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ENTERED AT THE POST OFFICE AT NEW YORK, N. Y., AT SECOND CLASS MAIL RATES.

No. 542.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., March 13, 1889.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. XLII.



OR, THE FIGHT FOR TWO LIVES.

A Sea and Shore Romance.

BY A. F. HOLT.

CHAPTER I.

THE MEETING IN THE PARK.

"HELP!—help! Oh, help!"

Ringling with startling clearness on the twilight air, a woman's voice suddenly reached the ears of Earle Fairfax, as he strolled leisurely along one of the many malls that traverse the Boston Public Garden.

Brave, impulsive, chivalrous—the idea of fair woman in distress was sufficient to rouse the lion in the young man's nature; in a moment he was dashing across the grassy lawn, in reckless disregard of the choice plants and flowers that his flying feet encountered.

The sound of scuffling feet guided him unerringly to the scene of the disturbance. There, in a gloomy spot in the park, a lady

HAD THEY ESCAPED CAPTAIN CLAUDE ONLY TO FIND A WATERY GRAVE AT THE
BOTTOM OF THE WILD ATLANTIC?

was feebly struggling with two brawny ruffians.

Earle's hot blood fairly boiled at the sight. He bounded impetuously forward, resolved to take a prominent hand in the game. Bang went his energetic fist against the cranium of the nearest garroter, who staggered back, half dazed. Another well-directed blow promptly sent him to grass; and the elated owner of the terrible fists quickly turned his attention to the second ruffian.

The latter had released his hold on the terrified young lady, and was now about to throw himself upon the unwelcome intruder. In one uplifted hand he held a gleaming dirk.

It was an inauspicious moment for Earle Fairfax, but that young man proved himself adequate to the occasion. His right arm suddenly assumed a menacing position, and the advancing thug looked into the frowning barrel of a cocked revolver.

This one simple movement was all-sufficient, for a serviceable shooting-iron in experienced hands possesses wonderful persuasive powers, and this particular ruffian was far from being indifferent to its influence, for turning, he made off with ludicrous haste.

The first rough, meanwhile, regained his feet, and was now making all possible expedition from the scene, and thus left master of the situation, young Fairfax now looked for the lady whose call for assistance he had answered.

She had fled from the spot when released by the ruffians; but paused a short distance away to note the result of the struggle.

The young man hastened to her side, to meet with a surprise.

The lady was young, richly clad, and—how beautiful! Never did artist's fanciful pencil, depicting the "form divine," image a fairer face or figure than that which now charmed the delighted vision of Earle Fairfax—at least so he thought.

"A very Queen of Beauty!" was the fascinated young man's mental compliment; but he suddenly realized that he was staring at the lady in a manner quite inconsistent with the rules of good breeding.

"It gives me unspeakable pleasure to have been able to serve you, miss," he said, after properly introducing himself. "I trust you have sustained no injury."

"Beyond a severe fright, I am none the worse for the adventure," the young lady assured him, speaking in a low, sweet tone. Then she hastened to express, in aptly-chosen words, her gratitude to her preserver for his timely service.

As the girl explained, she had passed the afternoon at the home of a friend, having directed her coachman to return for her at a stated hour. For some inexplicable reason, however, the fellow failed to appear at the appointed time; and, after long delay, she determined to go home unaccompanied. Being fond of exercise, she set out on foot, not anticipating trouble; but, while crossing the Park, at that hour comparatively deserted, two ruffians suddenly assaulted her from behind, one of them clapping his hand over her mouth to prevent outcry, though not quick enough to stifle the piercing shriek that brought Earle Fairfax to the rescue. Without doubt, the object of the attack was robbery, for the beautiful pin she wore at the time was now missing—probably in the garroters' possession.

"Such high-handed proceedings are a blight to the community, and some means should at once be taken to exterminate the horde of thieves and assassins that infest our streets," exclaimed Fairfax, indignantly. "Things have come to such a pass that it is actually unsafe for an unarmed man, much less a woman, to venture out after dark in some parts of the city. The columns of the newspapers are daily filled with accounts of robberies, assaults—even murders! Nor does it avail but little to report the cases to the police. One might as well appeal to yonder mute Washington on his steed of bronze!"

"Was your pin quite valuable, may I ask?"

"Yes, quite costly, I presume. It was a cluster of brilliants. However, I have several others at home, and so shall not mourn the loss of this one, as if it was my only treasure."

While thus conversing, the couple were

walking slowly from the scene of the disturbance. Fairfax now paused abruptly.

"Pardon me! Here I am walking with you without even asking your permission. Probably you do not care for my company."

"How absurd!" and the girl's laughter rung like the echo of a silver bell. "Of course, you are a stranger to me, Mr. Fairfax, but your conduct has shown you to be a gentleman, and as such I shall be glad of your escort, if it will not inconvenience you too much."

"Inconvenience? By no means! Many thanks for your kind permission."

Earle's heart was bounding joyfully.

"Do you wish for a carriage?" he inquired, as they emerged from the Park.

"Oh, no; that is entirely unnecessary, as I reside on Commonwealth avenue, which is close by."

"Yes; very close by!" emphasized the young man, regretfully. The distance was altogether too short, he thought. With such a lovely companion, he would willingly have undertaken a pedestrian journey to Patagonia.

They turned into Boston's grandest avenue, conversing freely as they went.

"Here is my home," said the young lady, presently, as she indicated a beautiful edifice—one of the finest residences that lined the noted street.

"Why, this is Luke Osmond's mansion!" exclaimed Earle, in surprise. "You are his daughter then?"

"No. He is my guardian. Perhaps you will think me very impolite not to disclose my identity before. If you will accept my card—"

"With pleasure!" Earle took the dainty visiting card, upon which the name "Bertha Deane" was neatly inscribed. "A very pretty name, and I shall always remember it—and its still prettier owner. But—but, that is, Miss Deane, I—I—"

"Well, Mr. Fairfax!"

"I was about to say," exclaimed Earle, desperately, "that our acquaintance though brief, has been so pleasant that I would fain renew it at the earliest opportunity. I am emboldened to ask if a future call from me would be acceptable."

"You may consider yourself welcome, Mr. Fairfax, at any time," answered Bertha, frankly. "However, I shall be at home but a few days longer. I am going away—to Europe."

"Europe?" echoed Earle, in blank dismay.

"Yes; I leave for Liverpool next Thursday, on the Cunard steamer "Cephalonia."

"Indeed? Not alone, of course?"

"With a single companion—my governess, an elderly lady."

"Will you remain there long?"

"Probably the entire season. We go to visit relatives in England, then make a short tour of the Continent. After my return, however, I shall hope to number you among my acquaintances."

"I shall be prompt to call, you may depend upon that," declared Earle, positively. He felt an intense interest in the beautiful Bertha, and the announcement that their acquaintance was so soon to be interrupted by her departure to foreign lands filled him with disappointment.

The door of the brilliantly lighted mansion now swung open, and a man appeared.

"My guardian!" breathed Bertha.

"Luke Osmond!" ejaculated Earle.

He had often heard of the aristocrat, and greeted his appearance with a curious look. It took but a single searching glance to create a decidedly unfavorable opinion of the magnate, and Fairfax was, in truth, a keen judge of human nature.

The man was slightly undersized, while constant ease and epicurean living had added to his body a degree of obesity that rendered his aspect bordering on the ludicrous, and none the less prominent because he was clothed in broadcloth and fine linen, and fairly glittered with jewels. Eyes small, dark and intensely gleaming, a hatchet face, stern and forbidding, stamped him as a sharp, shrewd, unscrupulous man of the world, who would stop at nothing to accomplish his purpose.

Luke Osmond wore a threatening frown as he descended the marble steps, and approached the couple.

"Bertha, what does this mean?" he abruptly demanded. "How happens it that you are returning at this late hour, and in the company of this ah—gentleman?"

The young lady hurried to relate her thrilling experience, dwelling particularly upon the gallantry of Earle Fairfax, who, during this recital, stood carelessly near, meeting with calm indifference the supercilious stare of the wine-flushed nabob.

"The coachman went for you at the proper time, and has not yet returned. Probably he has met with an accident," said Osmond, when Bertha had finished. "You shouldn't have ventured out alone, but should have at once dispatched a messenger to me. Hurry in, now, for guests are awaiting you!"

"As for you, my dear fellow," he continued, turning to Earle, "I am infinitely obliged for the interest you have taken in my ward's welfare. As you doubtless acted from no selfish motive, such kindness and courtesy should be well rewarded. Pray, accept this offering as a slight recompense for your services," and, as he concluded, he extended one jeweled hand, in the palm of which reposed a shining silver dollar.

The insulting speech and act cut Earle Fairfax to the quick. His face paled, while his whole frame quivered with passion, as with a quick, upward motion of his hand, he sent the coin flying back into the taunting face of Luke Osmond.

"Insulting dog!" the young man wrathfully cried. "I am inclined to mop the sidewalk with you, you old parvenu!"

His belligerent attitude startled the aristocrat into fear of bodily injury, and he was about to beat a precipitate retreat, when Earle's discretion came to the rescue, and the young man curbed his passion with a mighty effort.

"I will not strike you, for I am a gentleman! Did not your gray hairs protect you, I would make you swallow that insult, silver dollar and all!"

Earle Fairfax turned from the discomfited man, and hurried away, politely raising his hat to Bertha, who had remained, an indignant witness of her guardian's insolence.

He burned with anger as he strode swiftly homeward, but soon his wrath vanished before the more congenial thoughts that crowded his mind.

The fairy form of Bertha Deane seemed ever before him as he walked.

Earle Fairfax was deeply—hopelessly, perhaps—in love, for the next outward steamer would carry his idol far over the sea to distant lands—and lovers? The idea was tormenting.

"By Jove! I think I see my way clear," he exclaimed, suddenly possessed of a happy thought. "Though she have a thousand lovers, I'll distance the field and win her yet, in spite of her guardian. Now, next week my vacation commences; but, instead of wasting time and money at giddy Bar Harbor, as I intended, I will take a casual run over the big pond. I fancy I can make myself solid before the voyage ends. Yes, that's a proper idea! I, too, will be a passenger on the Cephalonia!"

CHAPTER II.

OLD CRONIES.

HAUGHTY Luke Osmond, successful speculator and gentleman of leisure, sat within an elegant apartment on the second floor of his Commonwealth Avenue residence.

It was his private room, the only one in the whole mansion that he cared to call exclusively his own, and where he was wont to spend much of his time complacently reviewing his victorious career, and contemplating new schemes to increase his wealth.

The apartment was richly furnished in strict accordance with the moneyed magnate's aristocratic taste. Furniture of choicest mahogany, elegantly wrought; carpet of velvety softness that sunk beneath the lightest tread; walls adorned by costly paintings and etchings; niches and corners occupied by rare bric-a-brac and statuary—everything that could possibly add to the beauty of the room, and make it fit for the occupancy of so distinguished an individual.

Yet, despite the magnificence of his surroundings, Luke Osmond did not seem quite at ease.

He reclined indolently in his luxurious

easy-chair, his feet upon a divan; in his mouth a half-burned cigar, at his elbow a table on which rested a decanter filled with ruby wine.

But his brows were contracted in an ominous frown, and he gnawed savagely at the end of his Havana. Finally his overcharged thoughts found expression in words.

"In three months, my ward will become her own mistress—in three months I must account to her for every penny of her father's colossal fortune! Little does Bertha imagine that I have already squandered a goodly portion of her inheritance! I assert that, when Abner Deane died and left his daughter to my guardianship, I honestly intended to fulfill my obligations in a manner worthy of the trust reposed; but, when unfortunate speculation swept away my own accumulations, was it more than natural that I should draw from this fund, so readily available, with it confident that I could retrieve disaster?"

"Of course I intended to make good the deficit, and no one would be the wiser; but, alas! my anticipated return of luck has failed to materialize. Capricious Fortune, once so propitious, now seems to have set her face against me, and mocking thwarts me at every turn. In my desperation, I have gone recklessly on from bad to worse, until now the situation is appalling.

"The world knows nothing of my predicament, for I still maintain my social position—at Bertha Deane's expense! What will the girl say when she learns the truth? The thought worries me. Were she not so infernally proud and high-spirited, I fancy it would be quite possible to smooth the matter over. But Bertha dislikes me, as I can plainly see. Already her bold, defiant spirit manifests itself, as her freedom day draws near. Only last night, she dared to rebuke me for what she termed my insolence to the young beggar whose acquaintance she made in the park. No; I need expect no clemency from Bertha Deane, when she discovers my perfidy!

"One hope remains! I have watched the grain market closely, and am convinced there is bound to be a rise. So confident am I, that I have ordered my broker to buy extensively. If this, my last venture, is successful, I clear enough to liquidate most of my indebtedness. And I *must* win—surely my tide of ill-luck must have its turning!

"But if, on the contrary, I fail again—then what? Shame—disgrace—ruin! An ignominious ending to the career of Luke Osmond!"

There was a wild, haunted look in the eyes of the nabob, and his sharp face wore a fevered flush. With trembling hand he poured a glass of wine, and drained the nectar at a single gulp.

At that moment came a rap at the door, and, in answer to Osmond's summons, a servant entered the room.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," announced the menial.

"His card."

"He has none, sir; nor would he give his name. He claims to be an old friend, however, and said you would readily remember him by the name he directed me to repeat."

"And the name is—"

"Blackbird!"

Luke Osmond gave a violent start, while his dark face paled; but he immediately regained his composure, and calmly directed the servant to show the visitor up.

"Is it possible that he is still alive, and has tumbled upon my dwelling-place?" the astonished magnate muttered. "What if he has let drop the secret of my early life? But, pshaw! Such a disclosure would be as naught compared with the revelations that the near future threatens to bring. This fellow is of intrinsic value in an emergency. His visit is very opportune—he may be of service yet!"

A moment later, Luke Osmond's visitor was ushered in.

A more magnificent specimen of manhood never trod "God's footstool," than he who now crossed the threshold of the nabob's private room. He stood over six feet high, and straight as an arrow, with a frame broad and powerful in proportion to his height—a veritable Hercules, whose every movement indicated wonderful strength and activity. His face was that of a man on the sunny side

of thirty, handsome featured and cleanly-shaven, save for a huge, piratical mustache of jetty hue, carefully trimmed and waxed. His raven hair fell about his neck in glossy ringlets; his clear eyes glittered piercingly. Hardy outdoor existence, with exposure to wind and weather, had tinged the handsome face with bronze.

Herculean in his strength, Adonean in his beauty—yet there was a lurking light in his keen black orbs, a cruel, sensual smile upon his face; in fact, a certain subtle, inexpressible something about the stranger's appearance that would warn the critical observer of a nature bold, scheming, unscrupulous. No sober-minded person, however courageous, would care to incur the enmity of this formidable man.

From the amiable manner in which Luke Osmond advanced to greet his guest, it was quite apparent that the two had met before, and under agreeable circumstances.

"Claude Kingsley—can it be possible?" the aristocrat ejaculated.

"It's myself, Luke, old man, big as life and twice as natural," quickly responded the handsome giant in a bold, ringing tone. "Just sling me your flippers, old hoss!"

The right hands of the two men met, and Osmond winced in the iron grasp of his visitor.

"Lightly—lightly!" he cautioned. "Your grip is adamant, and my old bones are growing sensitive." Then, when the gaping servant had retired, he continued, in a cautious whisper: "What are you thinking about, Claude, sending such messages by the servant? Heavens, man, don't give anything away."

"Far from it is my intention, dear Osmond," laughed the man whom Luke had called Claude Kingsley. "Not being provided with a visiting card, I sent along the name as a substitute—a password, d'ye see, to admit me to your august presence. It worked like a charm, and here I am. Of course, that blockheaded menial of yours could attach no particular significance to the name 'Blackbird.'"

"Possibly not; yet, one cannot be over-cautious. Such enigmatical expressions generally tend to excite curiosity, which sometimes leads to unpleasant discoveries."

"Well, there's no harm done, I reckon!" and Claude Kingsley laughed heartily at his host's manifest alarm. "No member of your household is likely to know of your connection with the 'Blackbird'—the jaunty craft that bore us both to fortune in the long ago."

"Unless you betray the secret by using your tongue too freely. You forget the adage—'walls have ears,'" warned the nabob, nervously.

"Ha, ha! You are the same cautious Luke Osmond, I see. Of course you would not care to have the story of your early career made public. Well, old man, bottle up your fears, for every man Jack of the 'Blackbird's' crew is dead, and you and I alone are left. The secret is safe between us; and as we are both in the same boat, of course it would be no object for one to betray the other."

"No, of course not—of course not," Osmond hastened to agree. "But again I implore you to be careful. I'm heartily glad to see you, Kingsley, my word for it, but don't neutralize the welcome by dwelling upon a subject that is distasteful to me. The past is dead—don't dig it up! Come, sit down! Here's wine and cigars. Make yourself comfortable, then tell me all about yourself since the day when we—ah—"

"When we dissolved partnership, I suppose you mean—when the presence of numerous Government cruisers rendered the pursuit of importing live 'blackbirds' from the African coast altogether too hazardous for comfort, and we wisely concluded to quit the business. Oh, yes, Luke; I've had a great many ups and downs since that eventful day."

Claude Kingsley seemed to take a malicious delight in referring to old times, and his persistence visibly annoyed the nabob. With an impatient gesture, the latter motioned his refractory visitor to a seat.

"Pardon me, dear Osmond," smilingly said the caller. "if my unruly tongue has spoken too freely to suit your tender conscience. I will endeavor not to offend again.

Ah! This is, indeed, comfort," he added, as he settled back into the cushioned chair with an air of evident satisfaction.

"Help yourself to the wine," invited Osmond, cordially. "I need not ask if you indulge, if you are the Claude Kingsley of old."

"Right you are, old friend. The juice of the grape agrees with me, and I expect you have something extraordinarily fine. Ah, yes!" smacking his lips, after a trial glass. "A rare old vintage, indeed. With your kind permission—another!"

He filled and refilled his glass with a rapidity that caused the eyes of the aristocrat to dilate, hardened tippler though he was.

"There, I feel like a new man, now," declared the visitor, desisting at length from his onslaught on the decanter. Then, selecting a cigar, he lighted it and puffed away with a vigor that soon enveloped him in a cloud of vapor. His sharp eyes roved admiringly about the room.

"You seem fairly well fixed, Osmond, old boy. Jove! It's strange how fate does engineer the lives of men, blessing some and cursing others. When you and I quit the slave-trade, twenty years ago, we were about equal as regards money. You have settled down to a life of increased prosperity—doubtless you are now a millionaire, while I—"

"Have had equally good success, I hope."

"Success be hanged. 'A rolling stone gathers no moss,' you know; and I am too wild and adventuresome to remain long in a place, so you can readily guess that I am not overburdened with finances."

"But how and where have you passed your time?"

"Oh! I have wandered here, there and everywhere. I have roamed the prairies of the wild West and the pampas of South America; sought for silver in Mexico and gold in Australia; dug for diamonds in South Africa and Brazil; braved the tiger-haunted jungles of India and penetrated the deadly wilds of the Dark Continent; hunted whales in the Arctic Seas, and even lured the festive codfish off the banks of Newfoundland—in truth, I have visited every inhabitable portion of the globe, and dwelt with every race from the fur-clad Esquimaux of the frozen North to the anthropophagous heathen in their attire of nature. Finally, here I am in cultured Boston, worldly wise, but no richer than when I started."

"Yours has been a truly adventurous career, Kingsley," ejaculated Luke Osmond, who had listened in undisguised astonishment to the words of the handsome rover. "What are your intentions as to the future?"

"I have an active campaign mapped out. You see, I have received the command of a fine vessel newly fitted out for a special purpose. The work just suits me, for, as you know, I am a born sailor; besides, there is a prospect of glorious remuneration."

"May I ask the nature of the expedition?" interestedly.

A strange smile flitted over the face of the tall adventurer.

"Certainly, you may ask, dear Osmond, but your query must remain unanswered. My mission is a secret, to be divulged under no consideration," he answered, firmly.

"But you should be willing to confide in me, your old friend and associate," persisted the nabob, his curiosity aroused.

Claude Kingsley, however, shook his head positively.

"No; the risk is too great—'walls have ears,' as you recently remarked. If the truth were known, Uncle Sam's domains would be too hot to hold me."

The mysterious words of his visitor aroused Luke Osmond's inquisitiveness to the highest pitch, but he knew Kingsley's unyielding nature too well to waste breath in further questioning.

"Very well," he said. "Excuse my curiosity. But, tell me, how came you here in Boston—or is that a portion of your uncommunicable secret?"

"It certainly bears relation to the subject. However, I can tell you so much—I am here with my new vessel, for the purpose of obtaining certain supplies which cannot be so readily procured elsewhere."

"And you knew I was here?"

"Not until we entered Boston Harbor. I

had completely lost track of you, Osmond, and often wondered whether you were dead or alive; but when we were running up the harbor, I sighted the most magnificent steam yacht I ever laid eyes on, and said I to the pilot, 'Whose craft is that?' 'Why, that's Luke Osmond's yacht—the Sunbeam,' answered he. 'What!' thought I, 'can it be that my old friend and partner is alive and thriving?' The idea was pleasing, and my first act was to come ashore with the avowed purpose of hunting you up. The task was easy, for every one seemed to know Luke Osmond. 'Oh, yes,' said the first man I met, 'he's the nabob of Commonwealth Avenue. Lives in the finest house in the finest street. You can't miss it.' So here I am."

"And I am heartily glad to see you, as well as astonished, for I supposed you had gone under long ago," declared the magnate.

"Not so. Like wine, I improve with age. My rough-and-tumble existence has hardened my muscles, invigorated my system, and preserved my youth. Would you believe I am on the shady side of forty?"

"You look at least a dozen years younger!"

"Just so; yet how different it is with you, only a few years my senior. A surfeit of ease and high feeding, has left its unmistakable mark, old chap. I don't think I'd change places with you, for all your wealth and luxury."

"No?"

"Decidedly not. I have health and strength, while you—Why, man, apoplexy is liable to claim you at any moment."

"Thanks for the information," said the nabob, coolly, though he could not wholly conceal the dismay caused by his visitor's thoughtless speech. "I am in no immediate fear of death. I may even outlive you, with your iron constitution."

"I spoke unwittingly, my friend. Pray, forgive my heedless tongue," uttered Claude Kingsley, apologetically. "By the way, Osmond, I caught a fleeting glimpse of the female form divine, as I came up the stairs. A beautiful face and figure, such as I fancy a seraph might possess. Not your daughter?"

"No, I am unmarried."

"I was about to say that, were you her progenitor, the young lady must resemble her mother," laughed the adventurer. "Well, she is not a servant, of course. Some relative—a niece, perhaps?"

"No relation whatever. Simply a ward, left to my care by a deceased friend."

"Indeed! Did he leave anything else besides this beauteous daughter?" asked Claude Kingsley, immediately becoming interested.

"If you refer to property, I assure you that my ward is very well provided for."

"An heiress, eh? To what extent, may I inquire?"

"A cool million," announced Osmond.

"The deuce you say!" and the handsome adventurer sat bolt-upright in his chair. "Shade of George Washington! What a chance to win gold and beauty!"

CHAPTER III.

REVIEWING THE PAST.

LUKE OSMOND eyed his visitor in surprise. "What's that you said?" he sharply demanded.

"I merely remarked that such a rare combination of wealth and beauty will prove a rich prize for some fortunate fellow," returned Claude Kingsley, promptly. "Doubtless your ward has countless admirers sighing at her feet."

"Quite naturally. Yet, their time and attention are simply thrown away. Bertha Deane is not the girl to bestow her hand and property upon any fortune-hunter."

The adventurer smiled knowingly, as he took a fresh cigar.

"Much obliged for your timely hint, for I imagine you mean to include me in the category. Let me inform you, however, that I am not in the matrimonial market. I have a keen appreciation for beauty, whenever and wherever I see it, but beyond honest admiration I never venture. What could a roving dare-devil like myself want with a wife?"

"Time may change your opinion. It is said that the most confirmed misogynist is destined to meet his affinity, sooner or later. I, for one, however, have rounded a half-century of life without succumbing to Cupid's wiles," and the crafty money-maker chuckled as he reached for the decanter.

"Hello! You have drunk up all the wine."

"Yes; I plead guilty to the accusation," Kingsley coolly admitted. "What's more, if you will kindly order up a fresh supply, I promise to do my share toward keeping it from spoiling."

"No doubt of it," muttered the nabob, with what was very like a grimace, as he rung for a servant; and presently the decanter was refilled and set before them.

"Here's to the health of that estimable young lady, your ward," quoth Claude, elevating his glass. "By the way, Osmond, won't you oblige an old friend with a few words of enlightenment? I am eager to know how it came about that *you* are the guardian of such a lovely girl, and a million dollars to boot."

Frequent indulgence in "the wine that is red" had put the nabob in a loquacious mood; consequently, it required but little persuasion to elude the desired information.

"It is a subject of which scarcely any thing is known outside of my own family; though there is no particular object in keeping it secret, beyond a natural desire to prevent one's private affairs from being universally known. However, you are an old friend—"

"And whatever you tell me will never be repeated from my lips," promised Claude Kingsley, as he settled back in the comfortable chair with an air of eager expectancy.

"Well, my guardianship dates back for a considerable period—fifteen years, to be exact," commenced Luke Osmond. "Abner Deane was a fellow merchant, whose acquaintance I made soon after coming to Boston, with the result that we remained fast friends to the day of his death. I enjoyed his confidence to such an extent that, when he departed this life, he left in my care his only child, Bertha, then but five years old. His vast fortune, for Abner Deane had been a shrewd, successful business man, was also left to me in trust, to be paid in its entirety to the girl when she arrives at her twenty-first birthday."

"And you say it amounts to a million?"

"Fully as much, including the accumulated interest."

"Whew! What a pile of rocks! And she is the sole heiress—were there no other children?" His wife was dead?"

"Yes; and that is the saddest part of the story. Abner Deane was blessed with an estimable wife and two beautiful children, the youngest being a boy over two years younger than Bertha, his sister. Well, it happened that Mrs. Deane, accompanied by her infant son, journeyed to a distant point in Maine, being called thither by the illness of her mother. Returning home, the steamer in which they took their passage went down in a terrible gale off Cape Ann. Only a few of the passengers were saved; and Abner Deane never saw his wife and child again. The blow was too much for the poor man, and in a week he lay beneath the sod."

Claude Kingsley had listened attentively.

"A very pathetic circumstance," he remarked. "This occurred, you say, something over fifteen years ago?"

"Yes."

"What was the name of the vessel aboard which the unfortunate lady took passage?"

"Let me see! It was the—the—"

"The 'Forest City?'" eagerly.

"Yes, yes; that's the name!" agreed Osmond, his memory stimulated by the suggestion. "Hello! What's the matter?"

Kingsley had started up with a sudden cry.

"Why, man, this is surprising," he exclaimed. "I, too, was a passenger aboard the steamer 'Forest City.' Well do I remember the fearful night when she went down. Driven from our course by the howling gale, we run straight upon a submerged reef. With an ugly hole stove in her bows, the craft immediately began to fill. On deck all was confusion; frightened passengers rushed aimlessly to and fro, while the sailors essayed to lower the boats with poor success. Giant waves broke over the doomed vessel,

and every roller washed one or more of the unfortunates into the sea.

"As I clung desperately to a mast, I saw among the passengers a handsome woman clasping in her arms a little child. Suddenly a falling spar struck the poor creature, and she fell lifeless to the deck. Prompted by a humane impulse, I sprung forward and tore the child from its dead mother's breast. Just then an enormous breaker swept me over the rail, still clinging to the child. A broken spar floated near, and to it I managed to hold, while I lashed the little fellow fast. I then tried to make my own position more secure, but the buffeting waves tore my cold and bleeding fingers from their hold. Luckily, I was seen by the occupants of a boat, which they had just succeeded in launching, and I was hauled aboard more dead than alive."

"And the child—was he saved?" demanded Osmond, who had listened to this narrative with breathless interest.

"We never set eyes on him again. There could be but one possible fate for a tender child in such an awful position. He was doubtless dashed to pieces upon the cruel reefs."

"Hapless boy! Were he alive, he would be joint heir to a million of money."

"Then you think the woman and child I have described were the wife and son of Abner Deane?"

"Certainly."

"Such was my impression also. Should it transpire that this boy did escape, and is still living, could he demand an equal share of his sister's inheritance?"

"Yes; because Abner Deane's will was made prior to the loss of his wife and child, and so devised that his property was to be divided equally among the three, with the provision that, upon the death of either heir, his or her share should fall to the survivors. So reads the will, unaltered by the codicil, which simply provides for the guardianship of the daughter, Bertha."

"Well, it's my opinion that the lucky girl will never be called upon to divide the riches. As for the shipwrecked child surviving, the idea is ridiculous."

"Of course," the aristocrat assented. "The boy's death is assured beyond a doubt."

"Miss Bertha is to be envied for her rare good fortune. When will she come into possession of this vast property?"

"In three months her twenty-first birthday occurs."

"And then your control of Abner Deane's estate is at an end?"

"Yes."

"Well, my dear Osmond, the Fates might be disposed to terminate the existence of this fair heiress. In case of her death, who would inherit the fortune?"

"To my knowledge she has no relatives living who could lawfully claim it."

"Then, Luke Osmond, you are a fool," uttered the visitor, deliberately.

"Sir!"

"Beg pardon. I meant to say that many a less scrupulous man, placed in a similar position, would not hesitate to feather his own nest at the expense of his helpless ward; but, of course, there could be no possibility that *you*, an honest man and upright citizen, would adopt such measures, however tempted."

Claude Kingsley spoke coolly, carelessly, but his keen eyes were fixed meaningly upon the flushed face of the startled nabob.

"What do you mean?" the latter nervously demanded.

"Merely what I said, nothing more nor less," quietly answered the ex-slaver, as he reached for a fresh cigar. "I think I made my meaning sufficiently clear."

Osmond was gazing intently at his visitor, with a peculiar light lurking in his small, evil eyes. Outwardly calm and imperturbable, yet his scheming brain was busily at work.

Before he could speak, however, a servant appeared bearing a letter. The magnate sprung eagerly from his chair and advanced to receive the missive.

"From my broker!" he exclaimed, as he scanned the superscription. "Is it good news or bad, I wonder?"

With eager, trembling fingers, he tore open the envelope, and hurriedly devoured

its contents. Very brief was the body of the message.

"Grain has dropped five points."

Only those words; but, what consternation did they bring to the breast of Luke Osmond! They signified another unsuccessful venture—another futile effort to avert the threatened ruin, and which, instead, only plunged him further into the abyss! Another enormous slice of Bertha Deane's fortune gone, and with it the wretched speculator's last hope of salvation.

With ashy face and wildly gleaming eyes, the nabob staggered back, while the paper fell from his trembling fingers. He sunk into his chair, and buried his face in his hands.

"My God! I am ruined!" he groaned, dismally. "More money—Bertha's money—gone to the winds! No hope for me now. I am lost—lost—lost!"

CHAPTER IV.

COMING TO THE POINT.

IN undisguised amazement Kingsley viewed these startling proceedings on the part of his host.

He hastened to secure the paper dropped by Osmond. As his quick eye took in its contents, a knowing smile flitted over the bronzed face of the rover.

This significant message, together with the incautious utterance of the aristocrat, furnished ample grounds for conjecture, and shrewd Claude was not slow to put this and that together. With wondrous penetration, he solved the mystery almost as much to his own satisfaction as if he had learned the truth from Osmond's own lips.

"Don't act like a baby, old fellow," he advised, approaching the cowering nabob. "The ex-commander of the Blackbird is surely made of better stuff. Here, drink this wine. It will brace your nerves."

The speculator lifted his head. His face was wan and haggard. He drained the extended glass, then continued to gaze absently at his companion.

"So you've been caught on the wrong side of the market, eh?" laughed Kingsley. "You seem hard hit. Undoubtedly it was quite a blow to thus unman an old stager like you."

"A cool hundred thousand," admitted the unlucky speculator. "What's more, it is but the latest of a dozen successful losses. Curse my infernal luck!"

"Your misfortune is greatly to be deplored, my friend; especially so when the fact is considered that the money thus squandered is not your own."

"Not my own!" echoed Luke Osmond, in feigned astonishment, though his face changed from white to crimson.

"That's what I said—not your own. I surmise that the money used by you so unwisely belongs to your ward, fair Bertha Deane. Don't feign innocence, dear fellow, for your guilty face betrays you!" and the rover chuckled grimly.

Indeed, the nabob could not repress a look of unutterable disgust and shame, for he saw that his visitor had shrewdly guessed the truth. He made no answer to the accusatory speech.

"Silent, eh? I thought you wouldn't deny it. Come, Osmond, acknowledge the corn. Haven't I hit the truth, plumb center?"

"You're a Yankee at guessing," Osmond growled, by way of response.

"A non-committal answer, truly, but quite acceptable," laughed Kingsley. "Now, Luke, kindly relate in a confidential way the particulars of this lamentable state of affairs. Remember, I am your friend, and may be able to aid you."

Luke Osmond was looking unflinchingly, now, into the face of the speaker. His attitude of abjectness had disappeared. Indeed, he seemed more pleased than otherwise, as if relieved at the disclosure of the secret which he had really desired to reveal, yet shrunk from the idea of unavailing his own duplicity.

"Yes; I'm in the deepest kind of trouble," he admitted, with apparent frankness. "Hoping to restore my own lost fortune, I have drawn heavily upon that of my ward, only to fail in every venture. The result is,

I am at this moment indebted to the Deane estate to the tune of four hundred thousand dollars."

"Whew! That's going pretty fast, my dear boy. What would beautiful Bertha say to such an unauthorized distribution of her funds, were she to know of her estimable guardian's proceedings? I imagine she would find means of making the atmosphere decidedly uncomfortable for Mr. Luke Osmond, eh?"

"Undoubtedly," agreed the nabob, dolefully. "Well, Claude, I have confided in you as a friend; uselessly, of course, for you cannot assist me in my misfortune."

"Financially, no. The sum total of my assets fails to come within hailing-distance of the amount you mention. However, there's a good old saw that says 'There's more than one way to skin a cat.'" Claude Kingsley looked significantly at the speculator as he spoke.

"I don't quite understand you," uttered the latter.

"Don't you? Well, Luke, as you have so generously taken me into your confidence, allow me to speak a few words of advice. You're in a decided fix, and there's two ways open for escape. Firstly, sell off your steam yacht and fast horses, dispose of your fine mansion, in fact, convert all your property into cash, and apply it to the discharge of your indebtedness. I dare say you could raise enough to cover the deficiency, and the truth would never become known. Such would be the course of a truly repentant man."

"But would leave me without a dollar—a veritable beggar! No; I cannot deprive myself of home, social position, everything."

"Of course not," agreed the rover, laughingly. "Such self-sacrifice would be entirely foreign to your selfish nature. Still, it would be much preferable to State's Prison."

"What is the second way of which you spoke?" Luke Osmond eagerly demanded, in a tone that showed how unlikely he was to adopt the first suggestion.

"If you have not yourself already guessed the alternative, then you are not the level-headed fellow I take you to be," said Claude Kingsley, meaningly. "To come right to the point, has it never occurred to you that, should Bertha Deane suddenly die or disappear, the problem of your salvation would be neatly solved? No one would ever appear to demand a settlement, and thus you would be left undisturbed in possession of the merchant's million, or what's left of it, to save or squander as you choose."

"The truth of your argument is obvious," returned the speculator, speaking with apparent composure. "However, there is little possibility that the girl will be taken off in the manner you suggest."

"Strange things sometimes happen," uttered the adventurer, carelessly, as he poured a glass of wine. He was watching the nabob covertly, and saw an eager, hopeful gleam shoot into the snaky orbs of that worthy.

"It's three months before my ward can claim her own; the intervening time, however, she will pass abroad," Luke Osmond informed his visitor.

"Indeed! Accompanied by whom?"

"Her governess, a Miss Lewis."

"When will she start?"

"In three days. Passage and state-room have already been purchased, *via* the Cunarder 'Cephalonia.'"

Claude Kingsley smiled in evident satisfaction at this intelligence.

"So much the better," he exclaimed.

"What do you mean?"

"Allow me to explain. You are aware that Bertha, after enjoying a gay season abroad, will return to take charge of her waiting property, then bid you an affectionate farewell. Now, that signifies to you—what?"

"Dishonor—ruin!" hissed the pale faced aristocrat.

"Yes; all that, and probably a long term in prison to boot. Now, Luke Osmond, what would it be worth to you to know that Bertha Deane would never return?"

The flashing eyes of the adventurer were fixed upon his host in a gaze so intense that they seemed to fairly penetrate the latter's busily working brain. Osmond, however,

met the look with one of assumed incomprehension.

"Such news would be quite cheering in a financial way," he answered, evasively.

Kingsley made an impatient gesture.

"Come to the point, without further palaver," he exclaimed. "You know just what I mean, Luke Osmond! You know that you would rejoice if Bertha Deane were out of the way. Judging from your past career as master of the slave-ship 'Blackbird,' you are well insured against the qualms of conscience, and will hesitate at nothing to escape disgrace and ruin."

"Yes; I know what's uppermost in your mind, Luke. I can read your thoughts as plainly as the pages of a book. Let me tell you that I'm ready to help you; but valuable services should be well rewarded. So stop beating about the bush, and talk plain United States. Again, what would you give to know that Bertha Deane had disappeared?"

"Never to return?"

"Never to return."

"Ten thousand dollars," offered the nabob with an air of hesitation.

Claude Kingsley laughed derisively.

"Ten thousand dollars!" he echoed. "You set a trifling value on the services that will preserve your present social status, besides making you master of a fortune. Surely you are not afflicted with over-liberality."

"Well, name a figure more to your liking."

"Twenty-five thousand is dirt cheap, considering the extraordinary delicacy of the job in question."

"Twenty-five fiddlesticks! You are extortionate in your demands. Make it fifteen thousand."

"Not a cent less than twenty-five—ten down to bind the bargain, and the balance to be paid whenever I bring satisfactory proof that the work is done. If you see fit to accept this proposition, all well and good; otherwise, I can do nothing for you."

Kingsley rose as if to depart. His decided action had its desired effect.

"Hold on! I accept the terms," exclaimed Luke Osmond. "But tell me, Claude, how do you propose to do this business?"

"That I cannot tell you, now. It's a difficult task, and will require careful arrangement of detail. However, I assure you that I will find some way of earning my money. Bertha Deane will never bother you again! And, now the guarantee, please, for it is late and, really, I must be going."

The nabob hastily scribbled a check for \$10,000 and handed it to his companion, who scrutinized it closely.

"I suppose this is straight enough," he said; "but I pin my faith on good Uncle Sam's bank-notes. They look a darn sight more substantial than a flimsy piece of paper. Well, Osmond, I am off; and as my vessel must sail in two days, and I have much to attend to, probably you will not see me again until I come to claim the balance of the twenty-five thousand. Ha! ha!"

"Ha, ha!" echoed the rascally nabob, whose flushed face clearly denoted his exultance. "One more drink, Claude, before you go."

The precious pair of plotters stood face to face, eye to eye, as the wine-filled glasses chinked musically together.

"Here's to the success of our scheme. Death to the heiress, long life to Luke Osmond!" proposed Claude Kingsley, grimly, and the toast was drank with great gusto.

A few moments later, the aristocrat had shown his visitor to the street-door. A demoniacal smile wreathed his lips, as he watched the tall form of the adventurer out of sight. Despair had suddenly given way to hope and confidence.

"I have forced my luck to its turning point," he grimly muttered, as he again sought his room. "It seems as if Kingsley were sent here purposely to aid me. I have confidence in the fellow, for his greed for money will urge him to use his best efforts to win the balance of the reward. Ha, ha! Miss Bertha, when I bid you *bon voyage*, it will be with the knowledge that you will never return to claim your father's million!"

Nor was Claude Kingsley less jubilant, as he strode rapidly in the direction of the wharf where his schooner lay. His scheming brain was busy; and doubtless Luke Osmond would have rested less serenely, had

he known the full import of the rover's thoughts.

"It was a lucky freak of fortune that caused me to visit my old associate, he muttered, elatedly. "A cool ten thousand in my own pocket as the result of an evening call; but that is not a circumstance to what will follow. Luke Osmond is a fool to think I will do his dirty work for a paltry pittance, while he enjoys the benefit of my labor. I imagine my head is level, and it's not my nature to be contented with a shilling when I can get a pound. From this hour I will devote myself to a stupendous game—the stakes a fortune and a beautiful bride!"

CHAPTER V.

ON THE OCEAN WAVE.

EARLE FAIRFAX was an exemplary young American. Left an orphan when a mere lad, homeless, friendless, with scarcely a dollar to call his own, he had faced the world with nothing but a laudable ambition to win a way, and was succeeding fairly well. Drifting to the New England metropolis, he had secured a position on one of the leading daily newspapers, and, having a natural taste for journalism, bade fair to make a mark in his chosen profession.

Twenty-four years of varied experience, necessitating constant intercourse with a stern, unfeeling world, had developed his strength, sharpened his intellect, and endowed him with a general practical knowledge far beyond his years. Not particularly handsome, yet his clear blue eyes danced with the light of a blithe and glad nature, while there was that about his whole appearance that stamped him as the personification of truth and integrity.

A model youth in every respect, Earle Fairfax naturally won nothing but golden opinions from all with whom business or pleasure brought him in contact.

The young man was an ambitious aspirant to literary honors, and, aside from the long hours of arduous toil exacted by his position, had found time for the completion of a bright little work, which, when brought out by a leading publisher, not only won unstinted praise from a host of readers, but even elicited a favorable notice from those captious individuals known as literary critics, who are seldom happy unless engaged in picking an author's work to pieces.

To Earle Fairfax, however, the most gratifying evidence of his success lay in the fact that he had just received from his publisher a check representing quite a respectable amount, the possession of which, together with the knowledge that he had already established a foothold on the ladder of literary fame, gladdened the heart of the young journalist, and encouraged him to anticipate a more propitious future.

Under such favorable circumstances, the young man naturally felt quite well satisfied with himself, and resolved to celebrate his good fortune by emancipating himself for a time from the thrall of labor. He had worked hard and incessantly, and now that he could afford a season of rest and recreation, it was not his intention to waste the opportunity.

It was while wholly engrossed in arranging the plans for a summer outing that Earle's wandering footsteps led him, one balmy evening, across the Common and into the Public Garden. He had decided to commence his vacation by visiting a well-known seaside resort, when Fate favored him with the acquaintance of Bertha Deane, as related in the first chapter.

This episode served to entirely revolutionize the plans of the young journalist. When he parted from the lovely girl that night, it was with the consciousness that, for the first time in his young life, he was deeply, madly in love. Yet, while blessing the circumstances that brought about this meeting, he was at the same time tantalized by the knowledge that Bertha's departure for foreign shores would seriously interrupt an acquaintance so pleasantly begun.

The idea was irreconcilable, but Earle's fruitful brain soon prescribed a remedy for the difficulty, quite satisfactory to himself at least. He resolved to accompany the young lady across the broad Atlantic, in the role of a fellow-passenger, making the most of his opportunities on shipboard, upon the result

of which would depend his course on reaching the realm of Victoria.

This hastily conceived plan of the journalist was audacious, not to say expensive; besides, there was no assurance that it would not prove to be a most pronounced fool's errand. Even were the belle of Modern Athens heart-free, there was a distinction in wealth and station that would have deterred a less resolute suitor. She an heiress—he but a struggling bread-winner.

But no thought of these apparently insurmountable obstacles entered the mind of Earle Fairfax. Love is said to be deficient in optical power; and the young man's set purpose was to keep as near as possible to the object of his affections, be the result as it might.

Hastening to his modest abode that night, after his unpleasant interview with Bertha Deane's surly guardian, the young man sought repose; but a myriad fanciful thoughts, crowding tumultuously on his throbbing brain, rendered sleep entirely out of the question, and he arose unrefreshed, after a fitful night, more determined than ever to put his plan into execution. Nor did he rest again until all necessary arrangements were completed. Then, possessed of a ticket entitling him to a first-class cabin passage to Liverpool, *via* the stanch Cunarder, Cephalonia, Earle had nothing left but to worry through the few days that must elapse ere the steamer sailed.

Each hour seemed an age to the impatient youth, whose thoughts were now centered wholly upon fair Bertha Deane by day, while by night fanciful dreams attended his slumbers, in which the radiant face of the city beauty beamed pre-eminently; but time will pass, however tardy, and the morning of the departure dawned at last, clear and glorious.

Fairfax promptly made his way to the dock where lay the huge sea monster, all trimmed and ready for the long voyage, smoke pouring in dense volumes from the great black funnels. The hour was early, and but few passengers had come aboard. Earle remained in his state-room until the hour for sailing was at hand, then went on deck to view the busy scene.

There was the usual amount of bustle and confusion attending the departure of an ocean steamship. Scores of light-hearted passengers thronged the decks, while the adjacent wharves were lined with a motley array of people who had assembled to bid *bon voyage* to departing friends, or to watch the great iron monster steam majestically away upon its long transatlantic journey.

As Earle Fairfax made his way through the animated crowd, he had eyes only for the well-remembered form of the Commonwealth avenue beauty, Bertha Deane, who was the innocent cause of such unusual preparations on the part of her ardent admirer. He soon espied her as she stood by the rail, accompanied by an elderly lady, waving a graceful adieu to a bevy of friends who still lingered on the dock.

The journalist sought to approach unperceived; but the young lady chanced to turn, and immediately observed him. She was evidently surprised at the meeting, but greeted him with a smile of recognition.

"You here, Mr. Fairfax?" she exclaimed. "Indeed, this is a pleasure which I had not anticipated."

"The pleasure is reciprocal, I assure you," returned Earle, gallantly. "Words cannot express my delight at finding myself blessed with such agreeable traveling companions. But is it not a glorious morning, Miss Deane? Certainly, a more auspicious commencement of our voyage could scarcely be desired."

"Yes, indeed; present indications point to a propitious journey. But, Mr. Fairfax, is it possible that *you* are really going abroad?"

"Such, surely, is my intention. You speak as though the fact implied something extraordinary," laughed Fairfax, amused at the young lady's evident astonishment.

"You said nothing to that effect during our recent meeting. I conclude your plans were formed subsequently." There was a roguish twinkle in Bertha's eyes as she spoke.

"On the contrary, I have long contemplated a transatlantic trip, but circumstances have hitherto deprived me of the opportunity. My arrangements were completed

several days ago, and it was an omission on my part if I failed to acquaint you of my intentions."

Earle felt that a slight stretching of the truth was quite excusable under the exigent circumstances. He spoke with refreshing coolness; but Bertha was looking straight into his face with her bright, beautiful eyes, and he fancied he could detect the slightest suspicion of a smile about her dainty mouth. Did she penetrate his secret? The youth could feel a tell-tale blush mantling to his cheeks at the thought; but the next words of the fair voyager put him again at ease.

"Indeed, Mr. Fairfax, this intelligence is as pleasant as it is surprising. We are delighted to number you among our fellow-travelers. Our acquaintances aboard are exceedingly limited, and what threatened to be a dull voyage, will doubtless be enlivened by your company."

"I fear you will be disappointed in my entertaining powers, for my repertory of accomplishments is by no means overstocked. However, I promise to devote my utmost efforts to the task of making my presence tolerable," the young man answered, gallantly.

He was relieved to see that, if the handsome heiress divined his real object aboard the steamer, she at least gave no sign that the knowledge was displeasing. Indeed, her words and actions implied naught but genuine gladness; and she continued the conversation with a naive animation that charmed Earle Fairfax, at the same time banishing all misgivings.

The charming land and water vista presented to the passengers of the outward bound steamship was well calculated to excite admiration and furnish a pleasing topic of conversation. Behind, the busy city, with its half-million teeming, toiling people, was fast fading in the distance. Beyond, infinite in its vastness, stretched the wild Atlantic. The island-dotted harbor teemed with craft of every description. White-winged vessels skimmed like swallows from the path of the iron monarch, saluting gracefully as they flew, while noisy steam-tugs whistled a shrill good by.

But gradually the scene changed; the last straggling sail was left behind; and as the Cephalonia encountered the rougher waters of the open main, there was a general tendency among the passengers to forsake the deck and seek the privacy of their own state-rooms.

The reason was obvious; for the constant rising and falling of a boat upon the heavy swells of mid-ocean invariably affords a new sensation to the unaccustomed stomach, with more or less disagreeable consequences. Earle Fairfax, together with his lady friends, were enjoying their first sea voyage, and consequently were forced to number themselves among the numerous unfortunates.

Within the seclusion of his own apartment, the young journalist passed a night of untold misery. It was a new and decidedly unpleasant experience; but Earle comforted himself with the knowledge that sea-sickness, with its attendant torments, is of but brief duration, and so impatiently whiled the lagging hours away.

When Fairfax went on deck, next day, having to a degree acquired his sea-legs, it was to find that Bertha Deane had preceded him. Her companion, Mrs. Lewis, being still indisposed, had not left her state-room. The young lady sat alone, deeply engrossed in the contents of a book, but when Earle appeared, she greeted him cordially and invited him to a seat beside her.

Here was a glorious opportunity to cultivate the acquaintance of the Boston belle, undisturbed, and the ardent young journalist was eager to improve it. He applied himself to the entertainment of his fair companion with a zeal and assiduity that was not without its effect. The entire afternoon was whiled away in conversation that seemed mutually agreeable; and in the evening a moonlight promenade on the hurricane deck added greatly to Earle's cup of happiness.

When Fairfax sought his berth that night, the second of the voyage, it was to feel, with pardonable self-assurance, that he had already established himself in the good graces of the queenly beauty whose heart and hand he bravely aspired to win.

Lulled by the rocking motion of the steam-

er, Earle's senses journeyed to the lethean land of dreams. Little did he imagine what the near future had in store! Little suspected he that deadly danger threatened to thwart his cherished plans!

How long the young man slept he knew not; but he suddenly awoke with a violent start. The apartment was in utter darkness and deathlike silence prevailed. Some subtle sense of coming evil seemed to pervade the mind of the awakened sleeper. Listening breathlessly, he fancied he could hear faint sounds emanating from the adjoining state-room occupied by Bertha Deane and her companion.

Slipping noiselessly from his berth, Earle hurriedly donned his garments and groped his way to the door. As he peered out into the dimly-lighted corridor, it was to recoil in dumb astonishment at the sight that met his gaze.

A man was gliding stealthily toward the companionway, and in his arms he bore the limp, motionless form of Bertha Deane!

For a moment surprise and horror chained Earle Fairfax to the spot; then, recovering, he dashed madly in pursuit.

CHAPTER VI.

A DARK NIGHT'S WORK.

AMONG the many who made the swift Cunarder their transient home, one man there was whose presence aboard the steamer had an all-important bearing upon the future of the beautiful heiress, Bertha Deane, though the fact was never suspected by the young lady concerned.

The name of Claude Kingsley, ex-slaver and round-the-world rover, stood upon the "Cephalonia's" passenger list. He had hurried aboard at the last moment, greatly changed in appearance since the night of his visit to Luke Osmond. The careless garb of the mariner was discarded for fashionable attire, while fluent speech and polished manners helped to strengthen his appearance as a gentleman of wealth and leisure. As he mingled unobtrusively with his fellow-travelers, more than a few admiring glances were attracted to his handsome face and magnificent figure, no one suspecting that the nature of a very fiend lurked beneath that fascinating exterior.

Who could suspect the true significance of the stranger's presence? Who dreamed of the diabolical workings of his scheming brain? Yet, Claude Kingsley was there for the sworn purpose of putting into execution the most audacious plan ever devised—a plan of such colossal magnitude and intricate detail that a man less indomitable would have shrunk dismayed from the undertaking.

Claude Kingsley was an extraordinary individual. Brave and bold, strikingly handsome, keen-witted and intelligent to a high degree, he might have occupied an enviable position in society, but for his unfortunate inclination to the bad, which bore him step by step from the path of rectitude, and transformed him into a reckless, unscrupulous adventurer. With a cunning brain to plan and a dauntless will to execute, as yet Claude Kingsley knew not the meaning of failure. Once resolved, no earthly power could swerve him from his purpose.

When the adventurer stepped upon the deck of the "Cephalonia," every detail of his bold plan was well arranged; and now he bided his time with the complacency of one who sees in the future naught but unqualified success.

He spent most of his time lounging carelessly about the hurricane deck, making few acquaintances, encouraging none. Hovering near the spot occupied by Bertha Deane, he watched her every movement with deepest interest, loth to turn his eyes for one brief moment from the vision of coveted beauty. The young journalist, Earle Fairfax, also claimed a share of the plotter's attention, for Kingsley could but observe that the enterprising youth was making excellent progress in the endeavor to ingratiate himself with the beautiful heiress. This fact was by no means gratifying to the watcher.

"So, I am to have a rival for the heart and fortune of the Boston beauty!" he grimly muttered. "Very good! My triumph will be all the more complete. I fancy the events of the next few hours will serve to upset the calculations of yonder simpering idiot."

The dark frown that had mounted the

rover's brow yielded to a grim smile, as he continued to watch the couple, his cruelly handsome face reflecting his exultant feelings, his keen eyes fixed gloatingly, fiercely upon the object of his passion, like the lurking jungle tiger who sees his unconscious prey almost within his grasp.

Little did Bertha Deane imagine, as she looked half-admiringly upon the Apollo-like stranger—little did she imagine that this man was the paid hireling of her nefarious guardian, whose purpose it was to see that she never returned to claim her father's million!

Night spread its sable curtain over the boundless ocean. Sea and sky merged into an inky blackness. The night was still and starless; sullen banks of clouds obscured the light of Heaven's luminaries. To an experienced mariner, the signs were portentous of foul weather.

The chilly, disagreeable temperature that prevailed soon drove the hardest promenader below; and at an early hour the upper portion of the great vessel, save for the usual ship's watch, was still and deserted.

But from the entrance to Claude Kingsley's state-room a dark form suddenly issued—the form of the scheming adventurer. Like a shadow he flitted to the upper deck, and moved cautiously from point to point. Two stalwart figures loomed before him, members of the steamer's crew.

"Is it you, Barney?" he interrogated, cautiously.

"Ay, captain!"

"And Dan?"

"Here, captain!"

"Good! What have you to report? Is the schooner in sight?"

"Ay, captain! We think we can make her out," answered the seaman, Barney. "Just look for yourself, captain—your eyes are sharper than ours. Maybe we are mistaken."

"Where does she lay?"

"Off the weather bow."

Kingsley approached the rail, and peered into the darkness.

Far, far over the gloom-shrouded sea, so distant as to seem but mere twinkling sparks, two beacon lights—a green above the red—steadily rose and fell with the motion of the waves.

After gazing long and steadily, Claude Kingsley turned again to his companions.

"Your eyes have not deceived you, men," he said. "Yonder are the signal lights of the schooner without a doubt. Lieutenant Lynn has shown rare good judgment in shaping and timing his course."

"Now, men, the time has come for us to act. You understand the part you are to take, do you not?"

"Ay, captain, thoroughly."

"Then get to work. Move cautiously, and no bungling, mind you, for the slightest blunder may thwart our plans. Have everything in readiness when I return."

Kingsley abruptly turned and hastened from the spot.

"The schooner is on hand, thank Fate," the adventurer chuckled, as he noiselessly made his way below. "Now, it remains for me to do the heavy work, with the assistance of Dan and Barney. Jove! It was rare luck that sent two of the Cephalonia's crew on the sick list, and enabled me to fill their places with my own true men."

Claude Kingsley proceeded with utmost caution, yet with the unhesitancy of one whose every movement was carefully prearranged.

Into the spacious cabin, now silent and deserted, he flitted like a shadow.

He paused before the state-room occupied by Bertha Deane and Mrs. Lewis, the location of which previous observation had determined. Cautious trial proved that the door was fastened, but the schemer anticipated this difficulty, and was fully prepared to meet it. A skeleton-key, deftly manipulated by nimble fingers, soon overcome all opposition, and Kingsley glided noiselessly into the apartment.

The gloom was intense; but the deep, regular breathing of the sleepers guided the midnight intruder to their berth. Like a grim apparition, his dark shape towered above them.

Claude Kingsley's operations were conducted with astonishing skill and celerity;

and after a few brief moments, the marauder drew back from his victims, deliberately striking a light, that he might better ascertain the result of his satanic work. Evidently his fullest expectations were realized, for his face instantly assumed an expression of diabolical glee.

"Ha! The drug is a success—works like a charm," he uttered, elatedly. "Surely, I am under obligations to the old African fetish who favored me with the secret of this wonderful anæsthetic."

The handsome fiend's attention was chiefly attracted by Bertha Deane, who occupied the lower berth. She had retired without disrobing, and now lay still and apparently lifeless, completely under the influence of the baneful drug so deftly administered by Claude Kingsley. Her pale face was wreathed by a profusion of nut-brown ringlets, the unconscious girl presented a picture of entrancing loveliness—doubly attractive to the audacious schemer, who realized this glorious prize was almost within his possession. To gain complete success required yet another bold, determined effort, and he knew there was no time to lose.

Lifting the form of the unconscious beauty, he hurriedly wrapped a heavy blanket around her, and started to leave the room. His movements, though cautious, were not altogether noiseless, and the slight sound his hastening footsteps made reached the ears of wakeful Earle Fairfax in the adjoining state-room.

As before stated, the latter was just in time to catch a glimpse of the daring abductor as he darted up the stairs. Claude Kingsley divined pursuit, and fled with desperate haste, bearing his precious burden with marvelous ease. Reaching the deck, he rushed straight to the larboard quarter, where his able subalterns, Dan and Barney, stood by the davits awaiting his appearance. One prodigious bound carried the rover over the rail and into the swinging, swaying boat.

"Lower away!" he ordered.

The craft shot downward instantly, striking the water with a loud splash. Immediately after, the sailors came sliding down the ropes with the agility of as many monkeys.

"Well done! Now, cut loose and push off! Quick, or the steamer will cut us down!" yelled Kingsley in excitement, and his orders were obeyed with a skill and alacrity that spoke well for the seamanship of his active subordinates.

Meantime, while rushing madly in pursuit of Bertha Deane's abductor, an unfortunate fall seriously interrupted the journalist's progress, and he arrived on deck only in time to see the dark figures of the seamen vanish over the ship's side. Running to the rail, Earle could barely distinguish the newly-launched boat, tossing wildly about in the rough sea in dangerous proximity to the huge steamship, while the occupants were striving desperately to pull away.

In that terrible time of grief and anxiety, with a chaos of confused thoughts running riot in his bewildered brain, the fact that the woman he loved was in awful danger rose supreme above aught else, and for a time rendered his fevered mind impervious to reason. Prompted by an irresistible impulse, Earle Fairfax mounted the rail, and, with a prodigious leap, shot far out over the raging sea.

He descended close to the receding boat, and one outstretched hand fastened upon the gunwale with an unyielding grasp. Startled beyond measure by this reckless act, the occupants of the craft now swore roundly when the young man, in his frantic endeavors to clamber aboard, threatened to overturn the boat and precipitate all hands into the water. It remained for Claude Kingsley to avert the impending danger.

Quickly rising from his seat in the stern, the rover bent above the gunwale and struck with his clinched fist at the upturned face of the struggling journalist. Stunned by the terrible blow, the grasp of the latter relaxed; and, had Claude Kingsley so chosen, the career of Earle Fairfax would have terminated then and there. But two sinewy hands clutched him by the collar, and, a moment later, the young man lay limp and motionless at the bottom of the boat.

Meantime, the lights of the "Cephalonia" were fast receding in the distance, as the great sea-queen plowed steadily on her way.

Quite singularly, the movements of Kingsley's party had entirely escaped the attention of the watch, and the bold schemer laughed amusedly when he imagined the surprise and mystification that must naturally attend the disappearance of the ship's boat, together with a portion of her crew and passengers.

Claude Kingsley had succeeded in one of the most desperate undertakings ever planned and it was with feelings of ineffable delight that he turned to the management of the stolen boat, now pitching wildly in the trough of the sea.

Still leagues away, the beacon lights of the schooner twinkled brightly, and toward these the adventurer shaped their course, while his men worked energetically with the oars. The vessel lay to leeward; and thus, aided by wind and tide, the smaller craft made satisfactory progress. A lantern was found in the locker, and this was lighted and displayed at the bows.

Presently from the deck of the invisible schooner a fiery projectile streaked hissing into the air, bursting on high and sending a shower of colored stars in every direction.

"There goes a rocket! The boys have seen our signal," cried the commander, exultantly. "Pull, lads, nor spare your muscle, for there's foul weather brewing, and if the gale finds us in this open boat, Old Harry himself won't save us."

The oarsmen bent to their task with desperate energy, and sent the craft along at a lively rate; yet, hours had elapsed when at last the dark outline of the waiting schooner loomed up before them.

A line thrown from the vessel was caught and made fast, and the party from the steamer soon lay safely alongside.

Claude Kingsley leaped nimbly aboard, to find himself surrounded by a group of rough, sturdy men, who saluted him with marked respect.

"Welcome, captain!" rung the hearty cry from scores of stalwart tars.

"Thank you, lads! I'm doubly glad to stand upon my own deck once more," returned the handsome rover. Then, turning to the hapless prisoners, who had by this time recovered sensibility and were now being forced over the rail, he greeted them with a mocking smile and bow.

"Welcome, my dear friends!" he exclaimed. "Welcome on board the 'Flying Fish,' and to the hospitality of Captain Claude!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE BANKS OF NEWFOUNDLAND.

ABOUT one degree southeast of Newfoundland's rock-ribbed coast, extends that wonderful formation familiarly known as the Grand Bank. The greatest submarine island on the face of the globe, it lies at a depth varying from ten to sixty fathoms, forming a rocky plateau which extends for a distance of two hundred by six hundred miles. Over this watery expanse dense banks of fog almost continually hang, for the chill Arctic current here mixes with the warm waters of the Gulf Stream, and thus these vaporious masses are constantly generating; yet, despite its cheerless aspect, this famous spot in the wild Atlantic is a veritable Mecca that annually attracts visitors without number.

Not for pleasure do these people come—no idle tourists they, but industrious fishermen, sturdy sons of the sea, who strive to wrest a hard-earned livelihood from the dismal waters; for the Banks of Newfoundland enjoy a world-wide celebrity as a fishing-ground. Though ranging almost universally throughout the cold northern seas, yet, it is at the Grand Bank that the cod, most valuable of all commercial food-fishes, enjoys a perfect existence. These fish, taken here in incredibly large quantities, are larger and finer in quality than those caught along the shores of the island or mainland.

That adventurous English navigator, John Cabot, who discovered and named Newfoundland in 1497, was the first to tell of the vast numbers of cod that swarmed the adjacent waters. Three years afterward, the Portuguese established the first fishery, and were followed by the French a few years later. From that time, year after year, the cod-fishing industry has been prosecuted more or less vigorously; thus, for a period of nearly four centuries, have the great Banks of Newfoundland furnished occupation

for the hardy fishermen of various nations, and, such is the wonderful fecundity of the cod, the supply shows no sign of diminution.

At the present time the Banks fishery is almost wholly conducted by Americans, French and native Newfoundlanders. The fishing-grounds do not cover the entire bank, but include a tract sixty-seven miles wide by two hundred miles in length, and during the season, which usually commences about June 1, and continues nearly five months, this region presents an animated spectacle.

Having thus digressed for the benefit of those who may be unfamiliar with the locale and history of this far-famed fishing-ground, the writer now calls attention to one of the numerous craft which lay at anchor on the Bank, one calm morning in the month of June.

She was a fine, handsome schooner—a model vessel, with the appearance of being fresh from the dock. Her long, black hull was newly painted; her masts rose straight and gracefully, while the neatly-furled sails gleamed with snowy whiteness. Upon the stern, in gilded letters, appeared the legend, "Antelope, Marblehead."

Aboard the schooner Antelope everything evinced a neatness and regularity really remarkable for a fisherman, and such the jaunty craft undoubtedly was. The deck was scrupulously clean; the metal-work was polished till it shone; everything was in its proper place. A matchless boat, and an equally matchless crew, if one were permitted to judge by the seaman who stood alone by the rail, gazing absently over the dreary waste of waters.

He was a mere youth, hardly more than eighteen, with a face singularly handsome, and a figure straight, tall and perfectly developed. Clad in the rough habiliments of the fisherman, yet even they could not altogether conceal the graceful contour of his form. His dark eyes flashed with the light of a glad nature; his bronzed cheeks glowed with the flush of health and good spirits.

Leaning idly over the schooner's rail, the young sailor seemed absorbed in thought; anon, his fancies found audible expression.

"Our trip has so far proved remarkably successful. It would seem that the new Antelope has brought increased good luck to Captain Kedge," he muttered, apparently addressing the dancing waves on which his eyes were fixed. "Only a few more such prosperous days, and we'll turn our faces toward dear old Marblehead. Yet, what does that signify? We land our cargo; then back we come to this dismal, foggy place, to join in the wild scramble for the fish that produce our bread and butter; and so, through the long season, our dreary routine of toil and danger continues. Truly has the poet said:

"Through storm and wind and blinding sleet,
Stout are the hearts that man
The fishing-smacks of Marblehead,
The sea-boats of Cape Ann."

Strange ideas enter my head of late—I cannot tell what it means. I am not discontented with my lot. On the contrary, the life agrees with me, and possesses a strong fascination, despite the toil and hazard. Yet, there is a subtle something ever whispering in my ears, telling me that I am out of my proper sphere—that I was destined for a higher position than a berth on a fishing-vessel."

The fisher-lad's soliloquy was suddenly interrupted, for a brawny hand fell heartily upon his shoulder, and he turned to confront a sturdy mariner who stood regarding him with a merry twinkle in his eye.

"Ha, lad! Caught ye in one of 'em brown studies ag'in, hev I?" cried the new-comer, accusatively. "Wal, what's in the wind now, Jack? What weighty problem has absorbed yer thoughts and brought that far-away expression to yer handsome face?"

The young fellow thus addressed flushed slightly before the steady gaze of his questioner; but it was with a careless laugh that he responded:

"You are mistaken, captain, if you believe there is anything particular on my mind. I was merely wondering how many fish our bultow will yield this morning."

"Ho, ho! Quite an appropriate subject to consider, keelhaul me if it ain't," chuckled

the old skipper. "Waal, now, Jack Lantern, 'pears ter me I kin answer that question for you, though I ain't no scholar. We'll have a fish for every hook on our lines; for sink me if I ever saw cod bite so fast as they are doing now."

"I hope your predictions will prove true, Uncle Tom. If our luck continues good, in a few days more the Antelope will be homeward bound."

"Ay, Jack, you are right; for already more than half our load is aboard. Such fishin' I never saw before, an' I've been in the biz for thirty years. Bless me if I don't believe my new craft, the Antelope, has brought good luck with her."

"She is a very mascot," declared Jack Lantern, affirmatively.

"What? Are ye goin' crazy, lad? Why, the Antelope is a schooner!"

"Ay, and a mascot as well, according to your own belief. A mascot, you know, is anything which brings to its possessor continued good fortune," the young sailor explained.

"Is, hey?" snorted the worthy fisherman, rather contemptuously. "Another of them new-fangled, three-cornered foreign words, I s'pose, sich as ye are always gatherin' inter your noddle. Now, look me straight in the eye, Jack Lantern, till I give ye some fatherly advice. I notice, of late, that when you're ashore you're always nosin' 'round among books an' newspapers an' sich trash, or pryin' into things that are of no earthly use to a poor fisherman who has to plow the seas for a livin'. Of course, eddication is well enuff for them that kin afford it; but it's a mystery that no sailor has any bizness to fool with. The more new-fangled, outlandish notions he gets into his head, the less he knows 'bout seamanship. Hear me, lad! Stick to your craft, let well enuff alone, an' spear me for a whale if ye don't yet command one of the finest vessels that ever sailed from port!"

With this good-natured tirade, the skipper turned to direct the work of the day, now about to commence.

Captain Tom Kedge was a model navigator—bold, steady, reliable. He enjoyed the reputation of being the ablest commander among the vast fleet of New Englanders who annually repair to the northern seas in quest of finny treasures. As a fisherman his success was remarkable, and generally his vessel was among the first to return to port with a full fare. Captain Kedge had some peculiar ideas of his own, and, while highly intelligent in his way—a veritable cyclopedia of nautical knowledge—he was obstinately regardless of all matters not appertaining to the calling to which he was inseparably attached.

"Douse my topights if I don't b'lieve the Old Scratch has got inter the head of that boy," muttered the bluff old skipper, as he crossed the deck of his peerless schooner. "I've noticed a change in his actions for some time past. While he does his duty in the reg'lar shipshape fashion, yet, I kin see he's losin' much of his old-time enthusiasm. Often, too, I ketch him a-starin' vacantly at nothin' in partick'lar, an' thinkin' of the Lord knows what! Codfish on the bultow, indeed! Shiver me! Does the lad think to fool old Tom Kedge?"

"Can it be that some subtle influence is at work on the lad's mind, awakening him to a realization of the truth? Impossible! Yet, something tells me there's a great change in store for Jack Lantern—that I shall lose my dauntless sailor boy! Queer things are wont to happen; an' would it be very strange if the waif of the storm should find his true berth at last?"

Thus soliloquized the hardy mariner; but these thoughts speedily fled as he prepared for the active work of the day, in eager anticipation of the fruit it promised to yield.

Half an hour later, two boats put off from the schooner, fully manned by lusty fishermen. One boat was directed by Captain Kedge, while the other crew was under the able young sailor, Jack Lantern, who rated as mate of the "Antelope." Away they went with an energy that could be displayed only by men who were fishing in great luck, and were eager to secure a full fare and a speedy return to port.

While the boats are dancing lightly over the foam-crested sea, it may be proper to say

a few words in explanation of the methods commonly practiced by the Banks fishermen to lure the much-prized cod from their native waters.

The simplest and least expensive method, and the one in vogue more especially among the native Newfoundlanders, is to fish from open boats by means of the common hook and line. With this primitive apparatus, astonishing results have been obtained; for the cod is a remarkably sharp, voracious biter, and, once hooked, requires no play and offers but a slight resistance. One man often obtains for a day's labor from four to five hundred fish, some of which approach a hundred pounds in weight. Yet, there are times, particularly when spawning, that the cod does not bite readily; and then it is that seines, nets and traps are brought into service. These are suspended in the water from floats of wood or cork, and by their use large quantities of fish are secured. A favorite apparatus, used most extensively on the Banks, is the so-called bultow—simply a kind of set-line or trawl. It consists of a long line, carrying a hundred or more hooks, and to which are attached at intervals several hundred short lines, each of which sustains a hook carefully baited with caplin, squid or herring. This lengthy contrivance is dropped from the boats and suspended from buoys, which, in turn, are securely anchored to prevent their being carried away by the strong currents. The bultow is visited each day, the fish are taken off and the hooks rebaited.

The bultow, the net, and also the common hand-line were employed by the men of the schooner "Antelope," their purpose being to obtain a full fare in the quickest possible time; for the first fish in naturally command the highest price, and Captain Kedge did not propose to be left far behind in the race. It was the custom to visit the lines and nets early each morning, after which the remainder of the day was passed in hook-and-line fishing, and this method resulted quite favorably to the industrious sea-toilers.

However, on this particular morning, a great surprise was in store for sturdy Captain Kedge. Rowing from the schooner, the boats' crew headed simultaneously for the two buoys that marked the extremities of the bultow. The captain's craft was first to reach its destination, and as she rounded the buoy, Tom Kedge leaned eagerly over the side, only to start back again with a cry like the roar of an angry bull.

"Foul play, my lads!" he cried. "Our line has been cut!"

CHAPTER VIII. RETRIBUTION.

THE announcement of Captain Kedge was startling, but quite true. Instead of the stout line with its hundreds of hooks, each holding a fine, fat fish, as the seafarers had fondly hoped to find, there remained—the anchored buoy, a fragment of line, and one empty hook!

As the astounded fishermen sat staring at the dismantled bultow, a loud shout from second boat proclaimed a similar discovery, and presently Jack Lantern's crew came racing up to rejoin their comrades.

"Our line is lost, captain!" announced the young seaman, breathlessly.

"Lost!" thundered the infuriated skipper. "You mean stolen! That there line couldn't swim off of its own accord. No, siree! It don't take half an eye to see the cord has been cut with a knife—cut slick an' clean!"

Captain Kedge held up what remained of the stout line, and the appearance of its smoothly severed end seemed to verify his statement.

"Who could have done this, captain?" Jack Lantern asked, in perplexity.

"My 'pinion is the dirty, white-livered skunks hain't far outer hailin' distance," declared the Yankee captain, with a significant motion toward a large schooner which lay some distance away, her outline dimly visible in the thick, foggy atmosphere.

"What, the Newfoundlander?"

"Ay, lad; that craft is the Reindeer, an' I know that her cap'n is the meanest, ugliest shark that plows these waters. His crew an' mine got inter a little squabble a few seasons back, an' the Canucks got the worst of it. This is the first time we've run afoul of 'em

since; but it seems the blamed sneaks hain't forgot us."

"They certainly employ a dastardly method of settling old scores—if it's true they're the guilty parties; and circumstances certainly point in that direction," declared the youthful mate.

"Right you are, Jack. The captain of the Reindeer kin explain this affair, sure as c-o-d spells cod. Durn the crawlin' coward! I mean to board his craft, an' fling his dirty carcass inter the sea, together with ev'ry mother's son of his blue nosed crew. I'll fix the sneakin', soulless, long-eared, lantern-jawed—"

And, his supply of complimentary adjectives suddenly becoming exhausted, the irate mariner filled the blank with an array of expletives that caused the surrounding air to assume a sulphurous tinge.

Nor was he alone in his wrath, for every man was fairly boiling with indignation at the dastardly trick.

Naturally there is no love lost between the native fishermen and the foreign intruders, and it required but this incident to fan the smoldering spark of hate into a flame. Had the word been given, these sturdy Yankee tars would have flung themselves, tooth and nail, upon their foes and rivals, the Newfoundlanders.

But Captain Tom Kedge, brave as the bravest when the case required, was not the man to court trouble when it could conveniently be avoided; and after that first wild outburst of an over hasty temper, he speedily became his own calm self again.

Obedying his command, the crews rowed on to where the huge nets were spread; and here another unpleasant surprise awaited the disgusted fisherman. It was found that all the fish had been removed, while the seines were cut and slashed so badly that many hours of labor would be required to render them serviceable again.

This time, however, Captain Kedge said not a word; but his face was ghastly pale, and his breath escaped in quick, short gasps from between his clinched teeth.

"Take in the nets, lads! We'll spend to-day in mendin', just for fun," he said, grimly, choking down his anger; yet there was a vicious gleam in his keen gray eyes that promised an exciting sequel to this morning episode.

A more disconsolate set of men never existed than Captain Kedge's crew, as they pulled slowly back to the schooner. Without delay, however, all hands set to work to prepare a new bultow and repair the damaged nets. This was an arduous task, and by the time it was completed and the apparatus replaced in its proper position, the day was nearly spent.

Night fell—chill, silent, starless! Naught to be heard but the sighing of the breeze, or the steady splash of waves against the schooner's side; naught to be seen save the twinkling lights that marked the anchorage of the neighboring fishermen. Darkness, like an inky pall, hung over sea and sky. But suddenly the quiet deck of the "Antelope" became the scene of unusual activity; and in a few moments a boat was lowered and pushed off, manned by a resolute crew.

Fearing that the Newfoundlanders might venture to repeat their cowardly work, Captain Kedge was determined, if such proved the case, to give the invaders a warm welcome.

Reaching a position near the outlying buoys, the Yankee fisherman dropped anchor and quietly awaited developments. So intense was the gloom that a boat could not be distinguished ten fathoms away; therefore, if the enemy apparently approached, it would be in total ignorance of the "Antelope" men's position.

Tossing idly on the tide, chilled and uncomfortable in the keen night air, the bold tars impatiently watched and waited. It was keen-eyed Jack Lantern who espied the dark shape of an approaching boat, as it shot suddenly into view, coming from the direction in which the "Reindeer" lay.

"There she comes!" he cautioned; and instantly every man was on the alert.

The strangers were stealing along with muffled oars, and evidently were bent on mischief.

Suddenly the hoarse voice of Captain Kedge rung out upon the silent air.

"Boat ahoy!"

The effect was electrical. The new comers stopped rowing with a suddenness that testified to their great surprise and alarm. Reasoning that the Americans would not expect a second visit so soon, they were quite unprepared for what followed.

"Boat ahoy!" cried the skipper, again; but his repeated hail evoked no reply. Instead, the marauders turned to retreat, hoping to escape identity. But the Yankee captain's temper was thoroughly aroused.

"After 'em, lads!" he ordered. "They shall show their colors, or we'll send 'em to the bottom. Give way, give way!"

The men of the "Antelope" were eager for a scrimmage, and it required but this order to put them instantly on their mettle. Like an arrow, the stanch boat shot after the fleeing depredators, who seeing they were pursued, rowed with desperate energy. No longer able to hide their true identity, the Newfoundlanders steered straight for their own vessel.

Plying their oars with perfect skill and precision, the Yankee fishermen quickly proved their superiority, for the pursuing boat gained steadily, despite the strenuous efforts of the fugitives.

Captain Kedge leaned excitedly over the bow, eagerly watching the progress of his gallant crew.

"Ahoy, ye lubbers!" he hailed. "Lay to, an' show your papers, or we'll run you down!"

A blinding flash, a sharp report answered him, and a pistol-ball hurtled in dangerous proximity to the skipper's head.

"Ah! Assassins as well as thieves! Consarn their ugly pictur's!" yelled the infuriated commander. "Give way, lads! Hump yourselves! We'll teach 'em not to fire on a Yankee tar!"

Cheering lustily, the crew responded with a mighty spurt. How the boat flew! She fairly skimmed the water. Scarcely three lengths now separated the flying craft. Suddenly disaster overtook the fugitive Newfoundlanders.

An oar snapped in twain, and the man who held it fell back against his fellows, causing momentary confusion, during which the boat was swerved from its course and brought broadside on against the waves.

At that moment the boat of the Americans, rushing irresistibly on, crashed into the trail side of the ill-starred vessel, which, crushed and shattered, immediately overturned, while its occupants were precipitated into the sea.

Scarcely had the victors cleared themselves from the wreck, when a third boat came suddenly upon the scene. The captain of the "Reindeer," perceiving the situation, had sent another party to assist the first, and they arrived in time to pick up their struggling comrades, while Captain Kedge was discreet enough to slip away in the darkness, quite satisfied with his revenge.

"I reckon them durn sea-lubbers won't meddle with our nets ag'in, right away," chuckled the old salt in high glee, as the triumphant crew made their way back to the schooner. "They know by this time that a Yankee tar kin do somethin' more than haul in fish."

"Doubtless they'll have sufficient sense to profit by the experience," Jack Lantern agreed. "Nothing will cure chronic cussedness quicker than a strong retaliatory remedy thoroughly applied."

"Avast, there, lad! Don't break your jaw-tackle on sich big words," rebuked the skipper. "Howsumdever, I s'pose I oughtn't to object, 's long's we've licked them lubberly blue-noses."

Yet, despite Captain Kedge's elation, he wisely took precaution to guard against any possible hostile demonstration on the part of the enemy. A vigilant watch was maintained, but proved entirely unnecessary, for nothing was heard from the Newfoundlanders. When morning dawned, however, they were seen in the act of taking up their nets and trawls, and, soon after, the "Reindeer" weighed anchor and moved slowly northward, obviously to take up a new position.

This movement on the part of their rivals was highly gratifying to the men of the "Antwerp," who now hoped to pursue their regular work without further interruption. But, soon afterward, the unwelcome discovery was made that most of their remain-

ing bait was spoiled and utterly useless, and this addition to the cup of misfortune put the Yankee fishermen in no happy mood.

To secure a fresh supply of bait it was necessary to visit the mainland, a proceeding that necessitated the loss of fully three days' fishing; yet, Captain Kedge preferred this course rather than return to port with but half a fare. Accordingly, preparations were at once made to leave the Banks, and the next morning, after the Newfoundlanders' departure, the fleet "Antelope" unfurled her "white wings" and sped away before a spanking breeze.

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNWILLING GUEST.

WHILE these stirring events were occurring among the rival Banks fishermen, destined to play an important part in this life drama, that mysterious schooner, the Flying Fish, was proceeding toward the Newfoundland Coast under full sail.

A finer craft never floated; and from her spick-and-span appearance it was evident this was her first voyage, for everything was bran-new and in perfect order. The long, low hull of the schooner, the tall, rakish masts, the tapering yards and spars—all parts shone resplendent with a fresh coat of glossy black paint; and this somber dress, in marked contrast to the snow whiteness of the sails, gave to the vessel an aspect weird and forbidding. There was no trace of name nor ornament upon the plain, black sides; but the former was symbolized by the figure-head—an elaborately carved fish with gilded wings.

Between her bulwarks ship-shape order prevailed; not so much as an uncoiled rope could be seen to mar the remarkably perfect regularity. Nor was the appearance of the crew less unusual.

A splendid set of fellows, physically, who performed their duties with rare skill and cheerful activity; but it was their attire that made them particularly noticeable. Clad in the usual sailor's habiliments, yet each garment was dyed a jetty black, save for a white "flying-fish" upon the breast of the jacket. This garb imparted a grim, ghastly aspect to the wearers, though it corresponded with the general gloom of the surroundings.

There was much of the strange and mysterious about the appearance of this somber schooner and its dark-garbed crew. No fisherman, nor yet a coast trader, the close observer would declare. She might more readily be taken for a pleasure craft; yet a glance at the dark, fierce faces of the crew would bring a strong impression that such was not the case. Indeed, were it not for the fact that this was an era of peace and order, all honest seafarers might have been justified in the desire to steer clear of the jaunty Flying Fish.

Whatever the true character of the schooner, one thing was evident—Claude Kingsley held command. That individual was no longer the leisurely gentleman, which role, as passenger on the Cephalaria, he had impersonated successfully though briefly. His elegant attire was discarded for a garb similar to that of his crew, and in this striking costume his splendid figure showed to wondrous advantage. Skimming the seas on his peerless schooner, Captain Claude was now in his element. Flushed by joy and enthusiasm, he walked the deck with the air of a master.

This feeling of elation, however, was not shared by the captive girl who languished in the narrow, uncomfortable cabin. Bertha Deane's precarious position was hardly calculated to superinduce contentment. Ignorant of the causes that had brought about this fearful change in her situation, the bewildered girl could but wait in lingering suspense, tortured by a thousand nameless fears, vaguely wondering what the future would bring.

In the midst of her distracted thoughts, the door suddenly swung open, and Captain Claude stood before her. Dangerously handsome looked the sea-rover in his somber uniform, and his face wore a cheerful smile.

"Good-morning, my dear Miss Deane!" he saluted, politely, as he entered the cabin. "Pardon the intrusion, for I am really solicitous for the health and comfort of my fair passenger, and wish to inquire how you are enjoying the voyage."

With a strong effort Bertha banished all symptoms of grief and despondency, boldly confronting the intruder with a look of scorn and defiance.

"You call me by name, sir; yet I have not the honor of your acquaintance," she exclaimed, contemptuously.

"Then permit me to introduce myself as Captain Claude Kingsley, of the schooner Flying Fish—at your service," suavely uttered the adventurer, ignoring the sarcasm of his prisoner.

"Well, Mr. Captain Claude Kingsley, of the schooner Flying Fish, your name is entirely unfamiliar to me; nor, I am free to state, do I care to cultivate an acquaintance with so questionable an individual."

Captain Claude flushed angrily at this cutting speech.

"You wield a caustic tongue, young lady, though I hardly think the situation warrants such presumption. A caged bird's notes should essentially be subdued," he retorted, grimly.

"Indeed! You liken my position, then, to that of an imprisoned bird?"

"The simile is certainly quite appropriate. This snug little cabin makes one of the best of cages, and, as for its occupant I know of none so desirable as my beautiful vis-a-vis."

"Enough of metaphor! Tell me, sir, if you are, as I suspect, responsible for this outrageous proceeding. Was it you who, I know not how, stole me from my state-room aboard the steamer, and brought me to this horrible place?"

"Truth demands that I answer in the affirmative, Miss Deane. Moreover, I am quite proud in the knowledge that I accomplished the difficult feat in such a thoroughly satisfactory manner."

"Scoundrel!" hissed Bertha Deane. "Why am I subjected to such villainous treatment? I demand to know, sir, and at once!"

"Your desire shall be gratified in good time. In truth, I have visited you for no other purpose than to give the explanation that you naturally crave."

"Proceed, then, immediately."

"Well, to begin," said the rover, as he deliberately took a seat near the fair captive, "I must ask you to judge me leniently for my questionable proceedings. When I tell you that I am simply acting under orders—the paid servant of a conspiring employer, you cannot fail to agree that the brunt of the blame rests upon other shoulders than mine."

"Do I understand that you are acting for the interest of another?" inquired Bertha, in surprise.

"Yes; I am but a willing tool, a base hireling—anything you may choose to call me. Nevertheless, I consider myself morally worth a dozen such men as my employer—the crafty individual who fondly calculates to enjoy the fruit of my labor."

"Then, if that be true, who is your employer? Who is the real instigator of this shameful outrage?"

"No less a personage than your guardian, Luke Osmond," declared the rover, with startling emphasis.

"My guardian!" cried the girl, in blank amazement. "No, no! You are mistaken. Not he, surely!"

"And surely nobody else," Captain Claude insisted. "I repeat, Miss Deane, that but for Luke Osmond your pleasure trip would not have received this strange interruption. My statement may seem improbable, but is none the less true."

"Yet, it is my privilege to doubt the truth of your statement, unless satisfactory proof is forthcoming. Certainly my guardian could have no reason for planning this abduction. I believe you are speaking falsely, sir."

"Ah! You are incredulous, and quite naturally, too. However, I will entertain you with some interesting revelations which, while removing all doubt from your mind, will also tend to establish my own reputation as a veritable apostle of truth."

"Proceed, sir; I will listen," said Bertha, calmly.

"It was just one week ago to-night, to be precise, that I visited your worthy guardian at his Commonwealth avenue residence. You see, Luke Osmond and I were friends and business partners in the long ago, but circumstances forced us apart, and it was by

mere chance that, when personal affairs brought me to Boston, I learned the whereabouts of my old associate. I assure you Luke was delighted to see me; and it was not long before I enjoyed his utmost confidence. From his own lips I heard a most interesting confession; and doubtless you will be astonished when you learn to what an extent your guardian has involved himself in trouble."

"Confession—trouble? I fail to understand your meaning, sir."

"Then permit me to elucidate. It seems your guardian, flushed by the phenomenal good fortune that has hitherto attended his operations as a financier, has plunged into fresh speculations with a recklessness that soon brought him against a snag—that is, he overrated his own ability for once, and was caught for a vast amount representing the winnings of years. Threatened with utter ruin, Osmond did not hesitate to appropriate the fortune left in trust by your father, confident that with it he could regain his own lost wealth, and intending, no doubt, to restore that so surreptitiously 'borrowed.' But bad luck now pursued him with singular persistence, and he lost at every turn, plunging deeper and deeper into the chaos of debt and dishonor. The result is, dear miss, that your worthy guardian and custodian of funds has, up to date, squandered little less than half of your colossal fortune."

Surprise, anger, dismay were pictured on the countenance of Bertha Deane, as she listened to the story of her guardian's perfidy. Before she could say a word, however, Claude Kingsley continued:

"I see you are astonished at the revelation, and well might you be; yet I have something more to tell you, equally strange and startling. Luke Osmond was not the fool to acquaint me with his troubles without having a definite object in view, and that object was to secure my assistance in relieving his embarrassment. The time was near at hand when his guardianship must cease; then disgrace and ruin would attend the discovery of his crooked dealings. Luke Osmond saw but one certain way out of difficulty. He reasoned that, should you chance to die or disappear before your freedom-day, there would be no one left to demand an accounting of Abner Deane's million, and consequently his own duplicity would never come to light. Now, Mr. Luke Osmond's selfish, avaricious nature was not calculated to withstand such great temptations, and he quickly seized upon the golden opportunity—in plain words, he deliberately arranged to have you removed from his path. When he bade you *bon voyage* on the morn of your departure, it was with the inward satisfaction of knowing you would never return to claim your inheritance."

White and motionless as an image of marble, the captive heiress had listened to Captain Claude's voluble utterance. His startling words sent a chill of horror to her very soul.

"It cannot be possible!" she at length managed to gasp. "Surely, my guardian would not murder me to obtain my property!"

"Murder you!" echoed the sea-rover, with a light laugh. "Did I say that Luke Osmond would murder you? No. Doubtless he would like to, but he lacks the requisite pluck, and prefers to hire somebody less chicken-hearted to do his dirty work."

"And so selected you as the most fitting instrument with which to effect his wicked purpose," uttered Bertha, with bitter scorn. "Captain Claude Kingsley, of the schooner 'Flying Fish,' you must feel proud of the role you are acting—the part of a miserable scoundrel, a paid assassin whose sworn purpose it is to destroy—to murder an innocent woman! May the wrath of a just God fall upon your heads—you and your infamous employer, Luke Osmond!"

"Calm yourself, young lady, and spare your curses until they are needed," laughed Captain Claude, with a deprecatory gesture. "Allow me to state that you are too prone to jump at conclusions. Why rave about destruction and murder in so blood-curdling a manner? I repeat, I have said nothing that should arouse your alarm to such a terrible extent."

"When I consummated my bargain with the honorable Luke Osmond—which bargain,

by the way, was bound on his part by the payment of a check for quite a substantial sum—I agreed to see that you should never return to claim your fortune. However, not a word was said regarding the means by which this perpetual absence was to be enforced. That part of the arrangements was left to my own discretion."

"Then, if my life is not desired, what, pray, are your intentions concerning me, now that I am unhappily your prisoner?" spoke Bertha, bravely, in tones of mingled hope and fear.

Captain Claude leaned still further backward, and complacently stroked his luxuriant mustache with his long white fingers.

"Your future, Miss Deane," he said, coolly, "depends entirely upon yourself."

CHAPTER X.

THE MASTER-VILLAIN'S SCHEME.

WITHIN the cozy cabin of the black schooner, captive and captor continued to gaze fixedly at one another. Captain Claude's dark eyes sparkled eagerly, and a suggestive smile played about his sensuous mouth; but the pale face of the heiress indicated naught but the deepest doubt and bewilderment.

"Pardon me, but I must confess my inability to comprehend your meaning, when you assert that upon myself the future altogether depends," she at length declared, in perplexity. "Will you kindly be more explicit?"

"You shall have the fullest explanation that is within my power to render," promised the smiling rover, promptly. "You shall speedily learn why you are at this moment aboard my vessel, safe and unharmed, instead of being at the bottom of the sea, as your guardian doubtless now fondly imagines—for Luke Osmond, in truth, plotted for and expects your speedy destruction, though we understood one another so perfectly that he did not deem it necessary to express his wishes quite so definitely. I undertook his dirty job knowing just what he expected, knowing that nothing would satisfy him short of proof positive of your death, and—I fear that Luke Osmond is doomed to disappointment."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that when I agreed, for a consideration of twenty-five thousand dollars, to accomplish your destruction, that your scheming guardian might enjoy a coveted fortune unmolested, I did so with no intention whatsoever of fulfilling my compact."

Bertha Deane stared at the rover with dilated eyes. His last words only served to increase her amazement.

"If that be true, what was your object in agreeing to my guardian's proposition?" she quickly demanded. "If you are not acting as Luke Osmond's hireling, then what means this strange proceeding? Why am I torn from my friends at dead of night, and borne to this mysterious vessel? Why have you—"

Captain Claude uplifted both hands in mock dismay.

"Fair maid, I beseech thee, do not bury me beneath an avalanche of interrogation points," he interrupted, entreatingly. "One question at a time will insure a much speedier reply, though I readily understand your anxiety to learn the full details of this interesting affair—particularly so because you are yourself the principal party involved. Well, be patient, and I will hasten to relieve you from suspense."

"First, I wish to impress you with the fact that, while I admit that I am many degrees removed from an angel, yet I am above the role of an assassin, particularly when the intended victim is so beautiful and vivacious as she who now sits before me. Therefore, when I ostensibly hired myself out as a first-class assassin, I did so because it afforded an excellent opportunity to effect a double purpose of my own."

"And that purpose?"

"Was, firstly, to right a great wrong by acquainting you with the truth, and by aiding you to circumvent the plans of Luke Osmond; secondly, to secure more beneficial results to myself, for, though the nabob's promised reward was a munificent one, I felt that you would be prompted to remunerate me even more magnificently for my services."

"Then, am I to consider you as my friend?" demanded Bertha Deane, in sur-

prise. The favorable speech of the sea rover inspired her with fresh hope and courage.

"I could certainly never feel other than friendly toward one so fair, so entrancing as yourself," Captain Claude gallantly declared.

"But, if you are really my friend, and not acting for Luke Osmond's interests, I am at a loss to understand why I am subjected to such arrogant treatment. Assuredly, to obtain an interview with me, and apprise me of my danger, did not require such extraordinary proceedings. Your course is very mysterious, not to say presumptuous."

"And at the same time quite essential to the successful consummation of my plans," added the captain, with a complacent smile.

"Certainly you are not so ungrateful as to doubt me, after my kindly efforts in your behalf."

"Granted your professions of friendship are genuine, Captain Claude, then I demand that you return me to my home without delay," cried the heiress, with sudden energy. "I long to confront Luke Osmond with the proof of his perfidy, and force from him full restitution for every cent which he has misappropriated."

"A just determination, truly; though I dare say Osmond will fail to welcome your reappearance. To him it means disgrace and beggary—just what he sought to avoid by effectuating your death. How the old rascal will rave, and curse 'your humble servant' for his duplicity. Ha, ha!"

"Then you will take me back to Boston at once?" cried Bertha, eagerly.

"As fast as my nimble craft will sail; yet—"

Captain Claude paused significantly.

"Well, sir?"

"You return only on conditions."

"On conditions?" echoed the young lady, in surprise. "Pray, what may the conditions be?"

"Simply that when you return to Boston, to confront Luke Osmond and claim your inheritance, it shall be as my wedded wife!"

Deliberately the words fell from the lips of Captain Claude, as he regarded his fair prisoner with eyes now gleaming with malignant triumph; and as Bertha Deane heard his startling speech, it was to feel hope and elation yield once more to dark despair.

From the commencement of this thrilling interview, the poor girl had been harassed by myriad conflicting emotions. The first feelings of fear and bewilderment caused by her strange situation, to which was added the rage and indignation produced by the knowledge of her guardian's faithlessness, had given way to hope when the handsome adventurer, with persuasively eloquent tongue, denounced Luke Osmond's villainy and declared his intention of championing her cause; yet, at the same time, she could but feel that some deep, sinister motive lay behind Captain Claude's professed friendship. Nor was she altogether surprised, when that schemer at length saw fit to show his hand, to learn in what direction his plans extended; and the revelation was well calculated to intensify her anxiety, for, despite her outward composure, she could but realize how helpless she was in the power of this mysterious rover.

"Listen!" Captain Claude went on, after pausing to note the effect of his words.

"You, Bertha Deane, may claim the honor of being the first woman to captivate my heart. Hitherto, I have remained impervious to the charms and wiles of womankind; yet, when visiting your guardian, I caught a fleeting glimpse of your fair face and form divine, and immediately vowed to lose no time in winning such a peerless prize, for I must confess it was an unmistakable case of love at first sight. An opportunity quickly came; for, that very night, Luke Osmond, relying upon an old comrade's assistance, made the proposition of which I have already told you and which I promptly accepted, foreseeing a favorable chance to achieve my purpose. I laid my plans very carefully, and every detail was as carefully carried out; the result is even better than I anticipated."

"Now, I have taken great pains to enumerate the details of this double game, that you may fully appreciate the part I have taken. You can scarcely fail to admit that it was a point in your favor when Osmond selected me as his emissary; for, otherwise, the work would have been allotted to another,

and your fate would have been horrible to contemplate. However, instead of a blood-thirsty assassin, you find in me a devoted admirer whose heart and hand are at your disposal. I am sure a natural sense of gratitude will urge you to look favorably upon my suit."

Thus eagerly, earnestly the shrewd adventurer made his plea; but if he thought to favorably impress his fair listener, his labor was in vain.

"Your appeal to my gratitude, as you term it, is entirely useless—a mere waste of breath," declared the heiress, peremptorily. "I am no child, to be deluded by your plausible explanations. Do not for one moment imagine, sir, that I cannot read your infernal scheme to its very bottom. Gratitude, indeed! Pray, Mr. Claude Kingsley, what have I to be grateful for?"

"For your very existence, fair lady. Have I not preserved you from the malignant designs of Luke Osmond, simply because I love you? Surely, that should be an all-sufficient reason," persisted the adventurer.

"Love? Pah! Even though I may be the unfortunate object of your admiration, which is quite probable, I fancy something more than my mere self is the center of attraction," declared Bertha, meaningly. "It was quite natural that you should disdain my guardian's offer, when you hoped, by winning my hand, to gain control of a fortune. Little wonder you were so willing to transfer your services from Osmond's cause to mine."

Captain Claude flushed angrily at this home thrust.

"Be that as it may," he said, defiantly, "the fact remains that I am a resolute applicant for your heart and hand—with your fortune thrown in, as a matter of course. And from present indications, I am led to believe my suit will not result unfavorably."

"Then banish the illusion immediately. Were I matrimonially inclined, which I am not, I may as well inform you that you are the last man who would win my favor. Such dubious characters are by no means to my taste."

"Dubious character, eh? Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the rover, good-humoredly. "By Jupiter! girl, you are nothing if not complimentary, in a left-handed way."

"No more than the occasion demands. Indications point plainly to you as a scamp, adventurer, fortune-hunter, if, indeed, not worse," cried the heiress, spiritedly.

"Call me His Satanic Majesty, if you choose. No epithet, however noxious, but would lose its bane when uttered by your sweet lips. I regret to know that you are so highly prejudiced against me; you might at least 'give the devil his due.' Yet, it really doesn't matter whether you believe me good, bad or indifferent, when I have you wholly in my power," said Captain Claude, serenely.

"Your impudence is amazing, if you think to force me into a marriage with you against my will," and Bertha Deane's bright eyes flashed forth scorn and defiance.

"Such a course is quite contrary to my intentions, I assure you. When you become my bride, it will be with your own free consent."

"Perhaps when I do, which will be—never!"

"Ah! You speak positively; yet, I imagine you will alter your decision when you know the alternative," said the rover, complacently.

"Never! Death, itself, is preferable to the course you propose."

"Not death, but worse, will be your fate, if you continue stubborn," exclaimed Captain Claude, viciously. "Listen to the prospect, girl! Promise to become my wife, and I will direct my vessel to some port on the Maine Coast, where the ceremony may be legally performed. After a wedding-tour to any point you may select, we will return to Boston in time to confront Luke Osmond and demand full restitution of your property. That done, you have nothing left but to resume your old life of ease and pleasure, with my humble self your acknowledged husband; and, as I am tolerably well educated, and really pride myself upon my good looks, I see no reason why you should be ashamed of the relationship."

"Well! On the other hand, what?"

"The alternative is a disagreeable one."

You shall never return to your home, and Osmond will continue in undisputed possession of your estate. You shall spend your days on board this craft, an exile from home and friends, dead to the eyes of the world. Here, on the ocean blue, we shall reign; I as the king—you as my queen! Now, Bertha Deane, you have heard the issue. Wife or prisoner—which do you prefer to be?"

Triumphantly, Captain Claude surveyed his helpless victim, while his evil eyes gleamed like those of a basilisk; for Bertha had shrunk back, suddenly trembling in every limb, and was staring at the speaker in undisguised horror.

But only for an instant! Her strength and courage quickly returning, the heiress sprang to her feet and fearlessly faced her captor.

"I do not fear you, Captain Claude, scoundrel though you are," she cried. "Do not think to intimidate me by your vile threats, for I defy you! I am in your power, now; but there is One above who will not permit your foul plot to succeed. Beware, lest the wrath of a just God fall upon your crime-cursed head!"

Captain Claude laughed disdainfully as he arose.

"Bah! I fear neither God, man, nor the devil," he cried, vauntingly. "No power on earth or in heaven can rescue you from me! I will leave you, now, to your own reflections, trusting that a night of sober afterthought will induce you to look more submissively at the situation. So, *au revoir!*"

With a mocking bow, the schemer withdrew from the cabin, and the persecuted heiress was once more left alone to commune with her own bitter thoughts. Unhappy Bertha! She had borne herself bravely during that long and exciting interview, but now her overtaxed nerves gave way, and scarcely had Captain Claude's footfalls died away when the poor girl threw herself upon the couch and burst into a passionate flood of tears. Ere long, however, unconsciousness came mercifully to her relief, and she lay like one dead within the cabin of the mysterious black schooner.

CHAPTER XI.

LIBERTY.

WHEN Earle Fairfax stepped upon the deck of the schooner "Flying Fish," he was speedily made to realize the gravity of the situation, for, in obedience to a signal from Captain Claude, a dozen stalwart tars stepped forward to seize him.

However, the sight of Bertha Deane, surrounded by this horde of ruffians, inspired the young man with dauntless courage, and caused him in his insane fury to lose sight of the truth that resistance against such superior numbers was worse than folly. So, the first man who essayed to lay hands upon Earle Fairfax encountered decided opposition in the shape of the latter's iron fist.

He fell to the deck, senseless, but his comrades surged around the young stranger like a swarm of angry wasps. Then ensued a brief but desperate struggle, in which Earle quite naturally came out second best, though not until he had succeeded in bestowing several black eyes and bleeding noses upon his adversaries.

The young man was pinioned hand and foot, after which a number of sailors picked him up between them, and unceremoniously bundled him down through the hatch and into the schooner's hold. In this dreary place, surrounded by intense darkness, Earle was left to his own reflections.

It was some time before he could recall his scattered senses sufficiently to think at all, so bewildered was he by the startling events of the night. As might be expected, the entire affair was to him an inexplicable mystery. It was plain, however, that possession of Bertha Deane was the main purpose of this mysterious party; but *why* the abduction had been planned and executed was a problem that Earle vainly taxed his brain to solve. Perhaps, he thought, some unprincipled scoundrels, knowing of the girl's vast wealth, had devised this desperate scheme to seize her person, intending to extort a large sum for her ransom; and that was the nearest he approached to a solution.

Be the motive of their captors as it might, the fact remained that Bertha was placed in an extremely hazardous position; and the

young man chafed at his inability to go to her relief. He mentally cursed his own stupidity in allowing the woman-stealer to escape from the steamer with his prize, when prompt action might have thwarted his designs. In endeavoring to save the one he loved, Earle had himself fallen into the hands of the Philistines; but for this he was more thankful than otherwise, since he was thereby enabled to continue aboard the same craft with Bertha, and sooner or later might come an opportunity to strike a decisive blow in her behalf.

At present, however, Fairfax could hardly consider himself in the *role* of a preserver, for his own position was one of complete helplessness. There was no alternative but to submit to the inevitable, trusting to Providence to open a way to liberty.

His prison quarters were, to say the least, uncomfortable. Lying at the bottom of the hold, powerless to move hand or foot, every lurch of the speeding vessel caused him to roll from side to side, resulting in numerous bumps and thumps by no means conducive to bodily ease. Sickened by the offensive odor of bilge-water, and annoyed by hordes of rats that scampered about the hold, Earle Fairfax endured an existence of gloom and misery.

From the increased violence with which the schooner plunged and swayed, he knew that the long-threatening storm had burst at last. He could distinguish the excited voices of officers bawling out their orders, and could hear the tramp of the sailors' feet as they hurried to obey. Tossed from side to side like a cask on an angry sea, bruised and sore from head to foot, the hapless young Bostonian was forcibly impressed with the horror of his situation.

The battle of the elements was of short duration, fortunately, and once more the stanch "Flying Fish" rode buoyantly upon the broad bosom of the subdued Atlantic, much to the gratification of the prisoner, whose position was now a trifle more comfortable.

Sleep came at last to the exhausted young man's relief. He slumbered long and soundly, and eventually awoke to find a burly seaman standing near, keenly watching him by the light of a dingy lantern.

"Hello!" ejaculated Earle, as like a flash he recalled the events of the night. "How long have I been in this place, and what are you doing here?"

The sailor's only reply was a sardonic grin, as, putting down the lantern, he quickly unpinioned the captive's arms and assisted him to a sitting posture. Then he drew back, pointing significantly to an object at Earle's side, which the latter now saw was a platter heaped with food.

Earle's eyes sparkled at the welcome sight, for the danger and excitement of the previous night had not impaired his lusty appetite one whit; and although his pampered stomach was unacquainted with the salt pork and hard tack rations placed before him, yet he managed to make out quite a comfortable meal.

Meantime, the sailor stood like a human watch-dog, keenly regarding the prisoner; and the latter resolved to question him.

"You are considerate to remember me in so substantial a manner," he said. "Suppose you do even more, and enlighten me as to the intentions of your leader in regard to the young lady whom he holds captive, and also inform me what disposal is to be made of my own humble self. I am exceedingly anxious to know."

The seaman only shook his head gravely, and placed a finger upon his lips, signifying that he was dumb so far as communication with the prisoner was concerned. Earle saw how useless it was to question the fellow, and wisely desisted.

"You might at least leave a fellow's hands free," he pleaded, as the sailor proceeded to renew his bonds. "Surely, you are not afraid that I will force my way on deck and slaughter the entire crew single-handed?"

But his expostulations were of no avail, for the tar grimly completed his work, then gathered up his plates and lantern, and ascended from the hold. The hatch closed behind him, and Earle Fairfax was once more left in solitude.

But the sailor's visit had inspired the young man with fresh hope and courage,

for it convinced him that his captors did not intend to starve him, at least, and as the fellow would doubtless return in good time to repeat the service, Earle felt that he might turn one of his future visits to good account.

Eagerly he set his brains to work to evolve his new idea into tangible shape, and at last devised a plan by which he hoped to soon regain his liberty. The scheme was an audacious one, and time alone could determine its success; yet, Earle's heart beat hopefully as he composed himself to endure the long hours of suspense that must ensue ere the time for action arrived.

Although he was ignorant of the time, day and night being indistinguishable within that dismal place, he calculated it was not far from mid-day, and that he would not be revisited until evening.

Fairfax hoped that the latter would be the case, for, should he succeed in gaining his freedom, he could work in Bertha's behalf with greater facility under cover of darkness.

After long weary hours of waiting, which seemed as many days to the impatient prisoner he saw the hatchway suddenly open, and knew that the critical moment was approaching. It was not his former visitor who now appeared, but a smaller man, and Earle's eyes snapped as he watched him descend the ladder, for he was confident that he could get the best of the fellow with anything like a fair show.

This sailor adopted the tactics of his predecessor, liberating Earle's arms and then retreating a few steps, where he paused to keep a wary watch upon his prisoner.

Fairfax seized the food and commenced to devour it with the avidity of a man upon the very verge of starvation.

Suddenly he dropped the dish and commenced to cough and splutter at an alarming rate.

"Help, help! I am choking!" he gasped.

The sailor was thrown entirely off his guard by this maneuver. He darted forward and bent over the young man whom he believed to be suffocating.

This was the chance Earle Fairfax had longed for, and he was ready to improve it.

With a sudden movement he threw both arms around the sailor's neck and pulled him to the floor.

Taken by surprise, the fellow essayed to call for help, but Earle's sinewy fingers were clutching at his throat and only a gurgling sound escaped him. However, he was a stout and active man, despite his undersize, and struggled so fiercely that Fairfax, handicapped as he was by the inability to use his feet and legs, feared that his effort would after all be vain. But with a mighty effort he managed to overthrow his antagonist, and pinned him to the floor in spite of his frantic endeavors to arise.

Throughout the brief but exciting struggle, Earle maintained his vise-like grip upon the throat of the sailor, whose resistance grew feebler and finally ceased altogether. Satisfied that he had choked his adversary into a state of utter insensibility, the victor's first act was to cut the cord that bound his feet, after which he utilized his cast-off bonds for the purpose of securing the fallen seaman. Earle's handkerchief made an effectual gag to guard against any possible outcry in case his foe regained his senses, and after this was securely fixed, the young man rose to his feet and elatedly viewed the result of his strategy.

One enemy was disposed of, and Earle was, for the present, at liberty. But on the deck above swarmed the redoubtable crew of the "Flying Fish," under the leadership of Captain Claude. Was it not sheer madness to contend against such formidable odds?

Within the dark and dismal hold, Earle gravely considered the next step in this perilous enterprise. There was no time to lose, for the unconscious sailor's messmates might discover his absence at any moment.

Acting under a sudden thought, he proceeded to divest the seaman of his clothes, and put them on over his own habiliments. This he was easily able to do, though he was much the larger man, for a Jack Tar's garments are always made with plenty of room to spare. Attired in the somber uniform of the schooner's crew, Earle looked every inch

a sailor, and hoped in the darkness to pass as such, undetected.

Without a moment's hesitation, he picked up the lantern and made his way to the deck, with firm tread, but with a heart beating with mingled hope and fear as to the result of his venture.

Reaching the deck, it was to find that darkness reigned supreme. A dense, impenetrable bank of fog hung over the sea, obscuring the luminaries of the sky. A better night for his desperate undertaking could scarcely be conceived.

As the disguised Earle emerged from the hold, a dark form appeared before him, and its owner hailed him with an oath.

"You're back, hey? Takes you long enuff to feed that chap down there. Move aft, now, an' stand your trick at the wheel. Stir yer stumps, ye lubber; an' salt won't save ye if I ketch ye shirkin' ag'in!"

Earle concluded that the person who addressed him so authoritatively was no other than the first-officer, who had mistaken him for the man previously sent below. There was but one way to prevent the mate from perceiving his mistake, and the young man was prompt to improve it.

With a muttered "Ay, ay, sir!" he hurried past the scowling officer, and made his way to the wheel, where one of the crew was impatiently awaiting relief. The latter greeted him with a gruff salutation, and lost no time in moving away, leaving the pseudo-sailor in sole charge of the wheel.

It was a situation as novel as it was embarrassing, for Earle Fairfax knew no more about steering a ship than a monkey knows about progressive eucher. However, he speedily found a way to rid himself of this incumbrance, by lashing the wheel amidships and leaving the craft to take care of itself.

Praying for a continuance of the good fortune that had thus far attended him, Earle started upon a cautious round of investigation, resolved to make the most of his opportunities.

Glancing over the stern-rail, he saw the dark outline of a small boat bobbing along in the wake of the schooner, to which it was secured by a painter. Doubtless it had been used in making some slight repairs upon the stern, and either by accident or design had not been hauled aboard again.

Instantly Fairfax determined, if he could find Bertha, to embark with her in the open boat and cut loose from the "Flying Fish." He knew they were no great distance from the Canadian Coast, and was confident they could reach land in safety, even if not picked up by some passing vessel.

With this thought uppermost in his mind, Earle silently made his way across the deck. The members of the watch were at their several posts, and, if they observed Fairfax at all, it was only to mistake him for one of their own comrades.

As the young man noiselessly descended the companionway, he saw in the dim light the figure of a seaman pacing slowly to and fro before the cabin door. Earle had no doubt but what this apartment sheltered the object of his search, though he failed to see the necessity of a sentinel, unless it was that Captain Claude wished to protect his prize from any intrusion on the part of his men.

The next task of the would-be rescuer was to remove this sentry from his path; and Earle wasted no time in deciding upon a plan of action. Gliding forward like a shadow, the daring young man was almost upon the sailor when an unlucky stumble betrayed him. The fellow turned like a flash, but too late to avert the threatened danger, for Fairfax made a prodigious leap forward and planted his clinched fist right between his eyes.

There was a world of energy in that well-directed blow, and the sentry fell with a force that effectually silenced him.

Earle quickly burst open the door and rushed into the cabin. By the light of the hanging lamp, he saw Bertha Deane standing near the center of the room in an attitude of surprise and terror.

As the young man entered she gave a cry of joy, for she instantly recognized him, despite his sailor garb, and sprung eagerly into his willing arms.

"Thank Heaven, I have found you!" exclaimed Fairfax, fervently. "Come! I am

here to save you, and there's not a second to spare. Follow me!"

Half dragging the eager, trembling girl, the rescuer led the way on deck without encountering opposition.

But as they glided silently aft, there suddenly arose a lusty shout, and the dismayed fugitives saw the dark forms of a dozen seamen advancing swiftly toward them.

"We are discovered!" cried Fairfax, in despair.

CHAPTER XII.

ADrift IN MID-OCEAN.

As the young American saw their foes only a few yards away and advancing rapidly, he felt that the situation was indeed desperate. Only the most prompt and fearless action could avert disaster.

Reaching the stern, Earle clasped his fair companion in his arms and vaulted lightly upon the rail, thence into the open boat astern. The little craft rocked violently, but was stanch and strong—as yawls usually are.

With desperate haste the youth cast off the painter, just in time to frustrate the designs of the foremost pursuer who made a frantic effort to seize it.

The boat dropped quickly astern, and, in an instant, was swallowed up by the foggy night. The schooner rushed on, her shape indistinguishable in the darkness, though her gleaming lights still marked her position.

Earle Fairfax felt a thrill of elation to know that thus far his exertions had been attended by phenomenal success; but he was by no means foolish enough to believe the pursuit ended. Captain Claude would spare no pains to recapture his escaped prisoners.

There was great excitement on board the "Flying Fish." Captain Claude was fairly beside himself with fury, and as he issued his orders his voice rung like the roar of an angry lion. The schooner was promptly brought to, and a boat's crew put off in hot pursuit.

The young man in the boat had not been idle meanwhile. He heard the preparations for pursuit, and realized that only the utmost skill and cunning could prevent recapture. Shipping the oars found within the boat, he bent to his task with a will.

Earle Fairfax was no novice with the oars; on the contrary, he was a member of a prominent amateur boat club, and had figured in more than one exciting race on the River Charles. With long lusty strokes, he propelled the craft steadily over the sea, and though he found the treacherous swells of mid-ocean vastly more difficult to master than a placid stream, yet he managed to make quite satisfactory progress.

A continuous splash of oars, plainly audible in the rear, told the fugitives their foes were in hot pursuit. The schooner's men knew the direction taken by the couple, but were unable to see them, thanks to the density of the atmosphere. They advanced with a rapidity that alarmed Earle Fairfax, for he readily saw the impossibility of outriving a dozen men.

There could be but one result to so unequal a race, unless by chance he threw the pursuing party off the trail, and this he attempted to do without delay.

Abruptly changing his course, Earle rowed with the utmost caution, lest an unlucky splash might betray his new position. Having gone what he deemed a sufficient distance, the youth lay on his oars and breathlessly awaited the results of his ruse.

On came the schooner's men, rowing in desperate haste. Evidently they did not anticipate this new movement on the part of the fugitive, for they went directly by at unabated speed.

Secure in the dense fog that hung over his boat like an inky pall, Earle chuckled grimly at the success of his trick. Waiting until the sound of the hoodwinked pursuers grew faint in the distance, he once more bent to his oars and proceeded cautiously in a direction that would eventually lead him to leeward of the schooner.

Suddenly Fairfax ceased rowing, for his quick ear detected the sound of working oars. Listening breathlessly, he was dismayed to learn that the new-comers, evidently a second crew from the schooner, were advancing directly toward the fugitive craft.

Before he could move to avoid this new

danger, however, Captain Claude's voice was heard, and the crew ceased rowing.

"Put about for the schooner, lads!" ordered the leader, sharply. "No use looking for 'em in this fog; but we'll lay-to till morning, and when the fog lifts we'll nab 'em, for they can't get far away."

The crew obeyed their captain's command, quite unconscious that by so doing they missed an almost certain opportunity of retaking the objects of their search, who were at that moment scarcely a dozen boats' lengths away.

Earle Fairfax breathed a deep sigh of relief to find the impending peril so opportunely averted.

"A close shave!" he muttered; and when the receding crew were well out of earshot, he devoted himself to the task of putting as much open water as possible between the open boat and the schooner "Flying Fish."

Up to this time neither of the fugitives had spoken, for each realized the value of absolute silence. Bertha had remained motionless in the stern, watching with admiring eyes the careful movements of her deliverer, and praying fervently for his success. Now, there was no further danger of immediate pursuit, and Earle hastened to cheer the drooping spirits of his beautiful companion.

"Safe at last! The rascals have wisely given up the chase. When daylight dawns we will be far away from the black schooner," he said; but he spoke with an assurance that he was far from feeling.

He realized the full gravity of the situation. Adrift in mid-ocean in an open boat, the fact was in itself alarming. Even should they escape the men of the "Flying Fish," which was by no means certain, there remained other dangers equally to be dreaded. Yet, while the young man was far from sanguine in regard to the future, he saw the advisability of concealing their peril from Bertha so far as possible, and therefore cheered her with encouraging remarks as he continued to guide the frail craft over the bounding billows.

A strong current setting in a favorable direction materially assisted the oarsman, and ere long the lights of the dreaded schooner were scarcely visible through the gloom.

Earle now ceased rowing for a time, and turned his attention to the comfort of his companions in misfortune. The night air was damp and chill, and Bertha suffered for want of adequate protection. Fairfax divested himself of the sailor's uniform that had served him to such good purpose, and, with the additional aid of his own coat and a roll of canvas which he found in the boat, managed to make her position to a degree more comfortable.

The wind was now rising rapidly, and the seas ran high. The little craft pitched and rocked violently on the troubled waters. Indications pointed to a severe gale, and Earle dreaded the probable result. No open boat could outlive a terrific storm, and the young man feared the worst. He now took the precaution to lash Bertha securely to the aft seat, lest a sudden plunge of the dancing boat should precipitate her into the sea.

The wind increased in violence; the waves rolled higher and higher. The craft was fast becoming unmanageable. Fairfax wisely shipped his oars, and, taking the tiller, strove to keep the boat before the wind. In this he was successful, though not without exerting his utmost strength.

On, like an arrow, flew the shell-like craft, now rising to the crest of a mountain wave, then plunging violently into the trough of the sea. Clouds of spray chilled and blinded the occupants, while the roar of the gale rung in their shrinking ears like the exultant cries of a myriad demons.

Earle Fairfax sat upright in the stern like a figure of bronze. The horror of the situation, far from unmaning him, seemed to steel his nerves. It was a time well calculated to try the bravest man; but the inexperienced youth who had shuddered at the mere thought of a gale, now that the crisis was at hand forgot his fear and faced the inevitable with the skill and coolness of the boldest tar. He was seaman enough to know the necessity of keeping the boat head on with the wind, for, should he fail in this, the first wave would overturn it and send them to destruction.

Clutching the tiller with an iron grasp, the brave fellow looked anxiously over the dark and raging waste of waters. Would the craft outride the gale? or had they escaped Captain Claude only to find a watery grave at the bottom of the wild Atlantic? The question must soon be decided; and Earle felt that, unless the gale soon abated, his own strength must fail. Then—death!

And Bertha Deane? In that hour of peril, when death seemed terribly near, the maiden bore herself with a fortitude that was remarkable; though her cold white face and trembling lips attested to the mental anguish she endured. Yet, she thought, better an unknown grave than the cruel fate intended for her by the commander of the black schooner.

It was a horrible scene—one that was never forgotten by either of its witnesses; but the end was near. The hand of Providence directed the storm-tossed sea-waifs, and caused a fitting termination to this night of misery.

Earle suddenly became aware that the gale was abating. The wind decreased in velocity, and the sea gradually resumed something like its ordinary aspect. The climax had been reached and passed successfully—the brunt of the danger was over.

The darkness now grew less intense, and soon the gray tint of early morning spread over the eastern sky. Anon, the sun—refulgent god of day—rose majestically above the horizon, sending his mellow rays over the glistening waters, smiling a royal welcome upon the exhausted castaways. The scene was wild and beautiful, in what pleasing contrast to that of the storm-swept night! The undulating ocean—no longer vexed—rolled serenely on as far as the eye could reach in every direction. There was no sign of land, no sail in sight!

That mysterious vessel, the Flying Fish, had disappeared from view.

Doubtless the gale had been of great service to the fugitives, by thus widely separating them from their foes. Perhaps the schooner had gone down in the storm, though it was hardly probable. Howbeit, Captain Claude had vanished, and for that the couple were duly thankful.

"An ill wind is it that blows nobody good; and in this case the storm that at one time threatened to engulf us has actually proved our salvation," exclaimed Earle Fairfax elatedly.

"It is the work of Heaven!" cried Bertha, earnestly. "The hand of Providence has preserved us from our foes."

Yet, the situation of the couple was still far from agreeable. Adrift in mid-ocean as they were, danger menaced them on every hand. A sudden storm might send the craft to the bottom; or, equally as deplorable, Captain Claude was liable at any time to reappear on board his mysterious black schooner. Again, they were without food or water, a circumstance that rendered starvation inevitable, unless they met with speedy rescue.

However, despite these impending perils, Fairfax was now inclined to look sanguinely to the future. Judging by the position of the sun, he was enabled to see that a strong current was bearing the boat in a north-westerly direction; and not a very great distance away, he believed, lay the island of Newfoundland. Knowing that the shores of this Province, and its adjacent waters, were a great annual resort for fishermen without number, Earle hoped to soon fall in with one of these vessels, aboard which they might then obtain passage to the nearest port.

He communicated his hopes to Bertha, who seemed greatly encouraged at the prospect of rescue. During the night there had been but little opportunity for conversation between the two, but now the young lady revealed to her deliverer that which he was curious to learn—the reason for her abduction from the Cephalonia, and the story of her guardian's treachery, as heard from the lips of Captain Claude.

Earle Fairfax listened like one in a dream. The magnitude and audacity of the double plot fairly took his breath away. It seemed scarcely credible that so dastardly a scheme could be planned and successfully worked in this nineteenth century of progress and enlightenment.

"Your story astounds me, Miss Deane," he ejaculated. "In all my journalistic experience I have never heard of a plot that would compare with this, either in shrewdness of conception or boldness of execution. Clearly, the fellow who calls himself Captain Claude is a scoundrel of the vilest stamp. It is indeed fortunate that you have escaped from his clutches."

"God grant I will never fall into his hands again," cried the heiress, shuddering.

"But for your brave efforts, Mr. Fairfax, my doom must have been horrible to contemplate."

"Now, however, the tables are completely turned. Have no further fear of your enemies, Miss Deane, for I am confident we will soon reach a place of safety. Then, you shall have my earnest support in meting out to your persecutors the punishment they so richly deserve."

Bertha Deane's eyes flashed with a dangerous fire as she thought of the indignities to which she had been subjected.

"My treacherous guardian, Luke Osmond, shall pay dearly for his villainy," she cried, resolutely. "He plotted to have me murdered; and need expect no mercy at my hands. The law shall take its course."

"Which signifies that the infernal rascal will find a resting-place behind the bars at Charlestown for a good term of years, though, if he were hung, drawn and quartered, the punishment would be none too severe. As for that arch-fiend, Captain Claude, he will fare hard if he ventures to molest you again."

Deeply interested as he was in Bertha's welfare, Earle Fairfax naturally felt a keen desire to bring her enemies to justice, and chafed at the unavoidable circumstances that prevented an early accomplishment of that purpose.

However, from their present predicament he hoped for a speedy delivery.

His keen eyes constantly searched the horizon for an approaching sail; but no such welcome sight met his anxious gaze.

No sail—no land; nothing but a monotonous vista of sea and sky!

How long were the unfortunates to thus remain, alone and unaided, to drift helplessly upon the foam-flecked breast of the tempestuous ocean?

CHAPTER XIII.

NEW DANGERS.

As hour succeeded hour, the situation of the sea-wanderers rapidly grew more disagreeable. Hunger and thirst began to make obvious their insidious pangs.

"Ours is the position of the Ancient Mariner," quoth Earle Fairfax, ruefully.

"Water, water everywhere,
But not a drop to drink;"

nor do I see anything hereabouts that would be of value to a hungry man. 'Eat, drink, and be merry,' is an excellent injunction that I would be only too glad to obey should opportunity present; but—Hello! What have we here?"

The young man's eyes were resting upon what had hitherto escaped his observation—a small compartment or locker in the boat's bows. Hoping to find something of an esculent nature, he hastened to overhaul the contents of the locker; nor was he entirely disappointed, for among a miscellaneous array of articles he discovered a bag of biscuits and a small keg of water. The presence of these articles, together with a quantity of hooks and lines, showed that the boat had been previously used for a fishing trip by the men of the schooner.

The discovery of these provisions, scant and unsavory though they were, served to revive the drooping spirits of the castaways to some extent; for so long as the hardtack and fresh water held out there was no immediate danger of starvation.

The water proved warm and insipid, while the biscuits were of the consistency of flint; nevertheless, the hungry wanderers conquered their aversion to the despicable fare and partook to their stomachs' satisfaction.

Then the eager watch was resumed, and as the hours of afternoon fled away, the occupants of the drifting boat continued to search anxiously but vainly for some sign of rescue.

Night was near at hand when Earle Fair-

fax suddenly started up, the despondent expression on his face yielding to one of joy.

"At last!—at last!" he cried, excitedly. "Our safety is assured, for see!—a sail!"

Bertha Deane eagerly scanned the horizon in the direction indicated by her companion. A glad cry escaped her lips as she saw the tiny white object that gleamed and danced in the far distance like the wing of a skimming sea-gull.

"It is, indeed, a vessel," she affirmed. "Yet, so far away! Will the crew perceive us?"

The young lady's fears were not without foundation, for the new-comer, which appeared to be a schooner, was at so great a distance that it was quite possible those on board would fail to observe the drifting boat as it bobbed up and down like a cork on the tossing tide.

As the possibility of this unlucky event dawned upon him, Earle's face lengthened perceptibly. Gravely he contemplated the situation. The schooner, it could be seen, lay off the larboard quarter and slightly astern, and was traversing a course that would eventually converge with that pursued by the row-boat. The vessel was moving at a snail's pace, for there was a dead calm.

Fairfax took up his oars, and, turning the boat's head to larboard, sent it flying over the water at renewed speed. His object was to intercept the vessel, or at least draw near enough to attract the attention of its crew. The slow progress of the schooner encouraged him to believe the attempt would be successful.

But while the young man thus urged his craft over the waves in desperate haste, a thick fog, coming with a suddenness peculiar to these latitudes, was creeping insidiously from the west. Ere long it had overtaken the schooner, and that craft was soon lost to view in a misty cloud.

This unfortunate circumstance at once served to destroy all hopes of discovery by the schooner's crew, for the fog now formed an impenetrable barrier against observation. Earle's only hope now, was to intercept the distant vessel by diligent rowing, unless the mist should suddenly clear, and that was hardly probable. Praying for a continuation of the calm, for should the wind freshen all possibility of outpassing the schooner was lost, he bent to the task with an energy that only desperation can superinduce.

But the boat's progress was soon checked in a manner both strange and alarming. The occupants suddenly became aware that a great black object was darting through the water directly toward them, and before this new danger could be fully comprehended there came a terrific shock that nearly overturned the boat.

A gigantic sword-fish, fully twenty feet in length, had made a vicious attack upon the boat, sending his yard-long ivory snout, or sword, through the side of the craft as if the thick timbers were but a sheet of paper. Finding itself stuck fast, the monster now struggled to extricate the sword from its oaken sheath, thrashing and churning the water with its tail at an alarming rate.

Earle Fairfax had read of these formidable sea-fishes, and their peculiar habit of attacking vessels of even the largest size; so, when he dropped the oars and bounded to his feet, it was to fully comprehend the nature of this new peril.

Grasping a convenient boat-hook, his only available weapon, he fiercely belabored the gleaming head of the sword-fish, as it struggled blindly for liberty. The blows, though stoutly dealt, had little effect upon the sea-monster, whose violent movements caused the frail boat to pitch and plunge, while the air was filled with clouds of flying spray produced by the constant lashing of its tail. Nothing but rare good fortune saved the craft from capsizing.

This novel battle had a speedy ending, however, for the fish suddenly freed its sword, and, its inquisitiveness evidently satisfied, quickly disappeared from view, leaving the water tinged with blood where it went down.

Yet, what havoc had this queer antagonist wrought in that brief time!

Both oars were gone—dancing lightly on the tide far beyond reach; and even as Earle Fairfax mourned the loss of these useful

implements, his dismay was increased by another discovery of a still more alarming nature.

The belligerent sword-fish had pierced the boat's side at a point slightly below the water-line, and through this fissure the water was now rapidly entering. Already the bottom of the craft was submerged.

The castaways viewed this latest calamity in speechless horror. Was there to be no cessation to their misfortunes?

Fairfax tore off his coat and with it endeavored to check the flow, but the force of the water was so great that his efforts proved fruitless. Then, too, the violence to which the boat had been recently subjected, both by the gale and the subsequent assault of the sword-fish, had opened its seams and weakened it throughout. In an incredibly short time water was entering through a dozen crevices.

With characteristic promptitude, Earle possessed himself of the keg containing fresh water, and with it, after staying in one end, strove to relieve the boat of its aqueous contents.

A few moments of arduous labor sufficed to convince him of the hopelessness of his task, for the water continued to rush into the vessel much faster than he could bail it out. He saw it would be impossible to keep afloat much longer.

His anxious gaze swept the sea in all directions. Where was the schooner?—at no great distance, he believed, yet the cruel fog effectually concealed her from view. Oh! if that exasperating mist would clear away, if only for one brief moment.

Perhaps the hidden vessel was at that moment within hail. The thought inspired Earle with a faint ray of hope. His stentorian voice rung out in a lusty appeal for help.

Again and again he repeated the hail, at the same time working vigorously with his clumsy bailing utensil. No answering shout came back across the gloomy water.

Were they, indeed, doomed to die, when aid had seemed so near?

The harrowing thought inspired Earle Fairfax with almost superhuman energy, and for a time he actually kept back the advancing flood; but this success could not long continue, for the youth was fast becoming exhausted.

The water now rose with appalling rapidity; the doomed craft settled deeper and deeper. The awful moment was near when it must fill and swamp. Further resistance was worse than useless.

The young man turned to Bertha Deane, who cowered in the sinking boat with covered face and trembling limbs. So young—so beautiful! Must she, too, find an unknown grave in the depths of the raging ocean?

Impulsively Earle Fairfax clasped her in his arms.

"Darling, death stares us in the face; there is no visible escape," he told her calmly and impressively. "In this hour of peril, which may be our last on earth, let me unfold my heart—let me tell you that I love you, and crave one little word that shall satisfy me that my affection is returned."

The fair girl looked earnestly, lovingly into his eager face.

"I do love you, Earle," she whispered, "and with you I can die happy."

He rained passionate kisses upon her upturned face.

"Darling! Death shall not tear us apart," he cried. "We will perish in each other's arms!"

Then the ill-starred boat and its brave occupants sunk down, down into the foaming tide.

Still firmly clasping the frail form of the one he loved, Earle Fairfax rose to the surface. With no hope of rescue, he did not struggle, but passively awaited the end. Bertha Deane lay motionless in his arms—unconsciousness had come to her relief, and shut out the final horrors of that awful moment.

But hark! What sound was that which came suddenly across the booming ocean? What object was that which loomed up vaguely in the gathering darkness, bravely riding on the crest of a mountainous wave?

A human voice—an approaching boat! What renewed life and hope was kindled in

the breast of the drowning man! Shaking off the lethargy that was fast enthraling him, he battled manfully with his disengaged arm.

"Help, help!" his eager voice rung out, and an encouraging shout responded.

The boat was bearing down rapidly, propelled by a dozen brawny arms. Struggling fiercely with the buffeting billows, Earle Fairfax felt his strength deserting him, when a strong hand suddenly tightened upon his collar, and the voice of its owner sounded in his ears.

"Steady, my hearties! I've grappled him fast. Lend a hand here lively, mates!"

The rescued ones were hauled bodily into the boat, and a moment afterward Bertha Deane reopened her eyes. She stared bewilderedly at the rough though kindly faces that surrounded her.

"Earle," she exclaimed solicitously.

"Here, darling," the elated lover assured her. "See! We are saved—safe at last."

"Safe and sound with the lads of the Antelope," explained the hale and handsome young fellow who seemed to be in command of the boat. "You see, we heard your cries on board—mighty faint and uncertain, but the captain couldn't rest without sending off a crew to investigate. So, here we are; and if it wasn't a close call for you, then I don't sail under the name of Jack Lantern!"

CHAPTER XIV.

AMONG FRIENDS.

ON the following morning, an interesting group gathered within the snug cabin of the schooner Antelope. It consisted of the rescued castaways, Earle and Bertha, together with Captain Tom Kedge and his able young first mate, Jack Lantern.

Earle Fairfax then gave a substantial account of their various trials and adventures down to the time of rescue by the boat's crew sent out by Captain Kedge. The latter was an attentive listener, and when the vivid recital was finished, expressed his sympathy in words far more forcible than elegant, and which issued from the very depths of his honest heart.

"Wal, I reckon as how ye are safe enuff naow!" asserted the Yankee skipper, after first relieving his mind by the use of numerous original phrases and scathing epithets, which were more or less uncomplimentary to Captain Claude, and quite unnecessary to reproduce here. "We of the Antelope are nothin' if not hospitable; an' a trimmer, tauter craft than this never pointed her nose to blue water. You kin expect to soon see port, though I can't promise 'bout Yewrup, whar ye say ye war bound, for that's a leetle outen the course, d'ye see!" and there was a gleam of humor in the old man's eyes as he spoke.

"The fact is not disappointing, for our trip abroad is postponed indefinitely," declared Earle Fairfax grimly. "Our only desire now is to reach Boston as soon as possible, as we have business of a peculiar and urgent nature to transact with a certain party."

"Your wish shall be gratified in due time, wind an' weather permittin', though at present the Antelope is takin' ye in eggsactly the wrong direction," said Captain Kedge. "We were takin' cod on the Banks, d'ye see, an' run short o' bait with only three-quarters of a fare on board. So we weighed anchor an' streaked it to the north'ard, intendin' to get a fresh supply on the Newfoundland Coast. That's how ye find us on this tack."

"It has proved fortunate, indeed, for us that your bait gave out. Otherwise, we would doubtless at this moment be at the bottom of the sea," and Earle could scarcely repress a shudder at the bare idea.

"Now, after taking bait, back we go to the Banks to complete our fare," pursued the skipper, "after which the Antelope will turn her nose toward old Marblehead. Meantime, you are my guests, an' ev'rythin' possible shall be done to make ye comfortable. Things ain't very elegant here, I'll allow, but who kin expect a fishin'-smack an' a pleasure-yacht outen one an' the same vessel? The young lady shall hev my own cabin here, which is tolerably comfortable, an' as for you, sir, I reckon you'll hev to swing a hammock in the forecabin along with the crew. It's the best I kin do for ye."

The young man laughingly declared his ability to endure the affliction, and also took occasion to thank Captain Kedge for the proffered hospitality.

"We are thankful to escape with our lives, without being at all particular as to our surroundings," he added. "As for the delay, a few days more or less will not materially affect our plans, while I am sure the time may be passed both pleasantly and instructively aboard your schooner."

Fairfax was delighted with his new-found friends, for, despite their rough exterior, he believed these hardy toilers of the sea to be of sterling qualities. The fishermen of New England are, as a rule, sober, honest and industrious, and Captain Kedge boasted of the finest crew afloat. The castaway couple had ample reason to bless the singular freak of fortune that threw them under the protection of such trustworthy friends.

After some time spent in further conversation, the party left the cabin and proceeded on deck.

Meantime, Jack Lantern had taken little part in the interview, but seemed lost in contemplation. From his position he covertly watched the face of Bertha Deane, which had for him a singular fascination. The beauty of the girl charmed and bewildered him, moreover, the sight of her fair face thrilled the breast of the young sailor with another and far different feeling than surprise and admiration—a vague, weird, indefinite sensation, the mysterious import of which his mind could not comprehend.

Reaching the deck, Jack Lantern abruptly left the group and took up a position by himself, leaning over the rail and gazing vacantly at the rolling sea.

"Who is this girl? and what is the strange influence her presence seems to wield over me?" he muttered, vaguely. "When she speaks her voice, so clear and bell-like, seems like an echoing whisper from the misty past. But, avast! Jack, my lad, what under the sun are you thinking of?"

"Sometimes I believe I am not myself at all. My head seems filled with a thousand vague ideas, all jumbled together in a chaotic mass. Captain Kedge says if I keep on this way much longer I'll be unable to tell the difference between a figurehead and a marline-spike, and shiver me if I don't believe he is right. But, pshaw! I'm a fool!"

Jack ended his strange soliloquy with an impatient gesture, as if thereby to dismiss the queer ideas that had found lodgment in his brain, and walked quickly forward.

Just then the lookout sung out in lusty tones:

"Land, oh!"

"Whereaway?" hailed Captain Kedge, merely as a matter of form, for he was too experienced a mariner not to know the exact location of the point he wished to reach.

"Dead ahead!" came the reply, and the old skipper chuckled in evident satisfaction.

"We've sighted the coast much quicker than I expected, considerin' the light wind," he said, to his guests. "I tell ye, the 'Antelope' can slip along with the best of 'em. This is her first trip, an' I'm right proud of her."

"Indeed, you have good reason to be, Captain Kedge. The craft bounds over the billows much as the four-footed animal whose name she bears is said to skim the Western plains," complimented Earle Fairfax, whereat the old salt's weather-beaten face brightened visibly, for he felt a boyish pride in his trim vessel.

All eyes were now turned toward the distant land, which seemed but a faint line of blue upon the northern horizon.

Under a favoring breeze, the "Antelope" forged swiftly ahead, and ere long the rugged coast-line of Newfoundland began to assume a more tangible shape. As the vessel approached still nearer, those on board, and especially the two strangers, were struck by the singularly forbidding aspect of the shore. Miles and miles of barren rocks stretched in either direction, forming a frowning seawall that towered in places to a height of fully three hundred feet. The coast-line was very irregular, being deeply indented by numerous bays and inlets. Dark, rugged cliffs reared their precipitous sides, and bold promontories jutted into the water. The entire outlook was wild and inhospitable.

The Antelope approached until about three miles from the shore; then her course was abruptly changed, and she stood to the west. Captain Kedge's duties having called him away from the couple whom he placed to call his guests, the latter approached Jack Lantern, who chanced to be disengaged, and entered into an interesting conversation.

The young sailor seemed somewhat disconcerted by Bertha's presence, but her bright smile and pleasant words soon reassured him, and he continued to point out various objects of interest along the rock-bound coast, with which he was perfectly familiar.

"It is, indeed, a picturesque scene," he agreed, in affirmation of the young lady's enthusiastic remarks. "Few visitors, however, have the good fortune to view it under such favorable circumstances. The entire coast is generally shrouded in fog so thick that one might almost cut it with a knife. The weather of to-day is exceptionable."

"This is what is known as the Western Shore," he went on, presently. "It extends for about a hundred miles to Cape Ray. Only a few leagues to the east from this point is Fortune Bay. Doubtless you have heard the name before."

"Yes; for it was the scene of constant quarrels between native and American fishermen, which developed into international difficulties," said Earle Fairfax, embracing this opportunity to give his historical knowledge a brief airing. "But that occurred in 1878, if I remember rightly, so you can scarcely remember the events, at least not in their detail."

"Captain Kedge has told me the story often enough to stamp it indelibly upon my memory, although the troubles happened before my sailing days," returned the youthful seaman.

"Ah! Was the gallant captain involved in the Fortune Bay difficulties?" asked the journalist, with an air of interest.

"He took a prominent part in the affair. You see, it was the custom of many American fishermen to visit Fortune Bay for bait. The natives claimed the visitors had no right to fish within a certain limit, but must purchase bait from them at an exorbitant price. The Yankees declined to do this, and continued to take in quantities of herring regardless of the Newfoundlanders' threats. This provoked a number of petty squabbles, and finally a large body of natives assaulted the American fishermen at Long Harbor. It was a complete surprise, and much damage was done to seines and boats to say nothing of personal injuries. Captain Kedge was one of the greatest sufferers."

"Yet, I dare say, he was comforted by a liberal slice of the seventy-five thousand dollars, or thereabouts, which Great Britain paid as a compensation for the havoc wrought by her belligerent subjects."

"I believe the captain received an adequate recompense for his loss; but it did not decrease his hatred for the Newfoundlanders to any marked extent. If you wish to see the jolly skipper in a towering rage, just mention Fortune Bay."

"Will you catch your own bait, in this case, or purchase it?" inquired Earle, after a pause.

"When Captain Kedge pays a cent to the natives for bait or anything else, you may be certain that his senses have left him," laughed Jack Lantern. "The bays and inlets hereabouts fairly swarm with bait-fish, and, with plenty of nets at our command there is no reason why we should go unsupplied."

"But the law! Is there not a clause in the international treaty that forbids fishing within three miles of the shore?"

"I believe so; yet the senseless arrangements of plenipotentiaries do not disturb old Tom Kedge. He believes in free fishing, and will not stop short at an imaginary boundary-line when anything may be gained by crossing it."

"Still, his audacity may lead him into trouble. I understand the Canadian cruisers are making matters uncomfortable for delinquent fishermen," said Fairfax.

"We do not fear the Government boats," returned Jack Lantern, coolly. "We have eluded them more than once in these waters, and can do it again. Our chief danger is from a far different source."

"I cannot comprehend what."

"Scarcely more can I. In fact, there are many events transpiring in these seas, from time to time, that savor of the mysterious. Several American vessels have recently disappeared as suddenly as if swallowed by the sea, though the utter absence of severe gales would seem to preclude the possibility of that event. Nevertheless, the craft have vanished, and it is whispered that human hands had something to do with their disappearance."

"Who is charged with the authorship of these outrages?" demanded the journalist in amazement, for this was to him an entirely new development in connection with the Canadian fishery troubles.

"It is suspected that certain of the native Newfoundlanders might throw light on the mystery, were they so inclined. It is an undisguised truth that they hate the Yankees, considering them as intruders. The Newfoundlanders are, as a people, industrious and unaggressive, and usually show their enmity in an open manner; yet, as in every class, there are many who would not scruple to vent their spleen by dark-handed deeds of treachery."

Earle Fairfax detected a look of anxiety upon Bertha's face, and immediately said:

"I suppose there is no particular danger so far as we are concerned. The men of the Antelope, I trust, are fully competent to protect their vessel from the manifold wiles of the enemy."

"You may well say that, sir," averred Jack Lantern, confidently. "When Captain Kedge is on deck there is no fear of running into a snare. He knows every indentation of this wild coast as well as a child knows its own mother, and is even now directing the schooner to a sheltered and little-frequented spot, where we may procure our bait and again be off without fear of molestation."

A moment after the young sailor was called away, and the interesting conversation ended.

Bertha Deane gazed wonderingly after the lad as he hurried across the deck.

"What a strange youth," she murmured.

"Who would think to find such rare intelligence in a common sailor?"

"He does, indeed, seem queerly out of place among his rough associates," assented her lover. "He talks with the fluency of a full-fledged lawyer, and has the manners of a perfect gentleman. Then, too, he seems a gallant lad, and cherishes a golden opinion of his commander, Captain Kedge."

"I have taken a decided interest in the handsome sailor boy, and would like to learn his history," declared Bertha Deane. "His name, too, is calculated to excite curiosity. Jack Lantern! So suggestive of that mysterious evil genius once superstitiously believed to haunt benighted travelers and lure them to destruction with his phantom light!"

"Really, Mr. Fairfax, my inquisitiveness is aroused, and I must request you to seize the first opportunity to glean information from the captain concerning this gentlemanly young seaman with the *ignis-fatuus* name."

CHAPTER XV.

ELUDING THE CRUISER.

THE fleet schooner "Antelope" continued her course, maintaining a fair distance from the frowning coast. Finally the vessel was headed straight for the snore, and, passing between two rocky promontories, she came to an anchor in a small sheltered bay.

This was the place where Captain Kedge proposed to obtain a supply of bait; and a more suitable spot could hardly be imagined. Though he violated the treaty laws by thus boldly approaching the shore, the skipper entertained no fear of discovery, for in her present position the "Antelope" could not be seen by any passing vessel, and the crew were free to work in comparative safety.

No time was lost in getting to work, for Captain Kedge felt anxious to return to the fishing-grounds. Hardly was the anchor dropped when the fishermen prepared for action. Every boat was lowered, and their respective crews assumed different positions along the shores of the bay, armed with seines and hand-nets.

Earle Fairfax was content to remain with Bertha aboard the vessel, and watch the operations at a distance, as the seamen

worked in plain view. From the one man left in charge of the schooner considerable information was gleaned concerning the movements of his shipmates.

The caplin is a beautiful little fish, never more than seven inches long, which annually approaches the shore to spawn, remaining six or seven weeks, and swarming in vast schools in every bay and creek. It furnishes the best of bait for deep-sea fishing, and is caught in enormous quantities for that purpose; while farmers often buy them by the cart-load to mix with earth for fertilizing. Their numbers are incredible; indeed, it is said, a man has been known to stand on the shores with a hand net and fill a cart in an hour.

This particular bay was literally alive with caplin, and so it was not long before the crew were seen returning with their boats laden almost to the gunwale with finny treasure.

Earle Fairfax was pleased to know that their stay was to be a brief one; for, while sympathizing with the cause of the American fishermen, he lamented their temerity in venturing on forbidden waters, where there was imminent risk of discovery and capture by some British cruiser.

The young man felt no little concern, both for himself and for his fair companion, as, in event of capture, their presence aboard a confiscated vessel was likely to cause serious delay and inconvenience. Could he have peered into the near future, however, he might have been more willing to remain within the land-locked basin and trust to luck to avoid the Government boats.

The work of bait-catching went on rapidly, and it was yet long before sun down when Captain Kedge declared the operations ended. Preparations were immediately made for a return trip to the banks. Yet, the Yankee skipper, though anxious to get under way, was too wary to venture boldly out to sea without first assuring himself that the coast was clear. A hostile craft might at any moment appear in the offing, and Captain Kedge did not propose to be caught napping.

A man was sent ashore to an elevated spot that commanded an extensive view in all directions. The lookout quickly returned, and his report proved that the captain's precaution was most timely.

A strange sail was swiftly approaching from the West, the sailor reported; and this unwelcome intelligence produced a look of disgust on the commander's bronzed face.

"Come along, Jack Lantern!" he ordered. "We'll see for ourselves what the stranger looks like. If it proves to be one of 'em 'tarnal Blue-nose fishermen, we'll steer right out an' snap our fingers at 'em; but if it's a cruiser, then I reckon there's no disgrace in keepin' well hidden."

Captain Kedge invariably sought the advice and companionship of his young *protege* when there was anything unusual in the wind. The bright ideas of Jack Lantern had been of incalculable value in various instances where prompt and skillful action was necessary.

They were rowed to the shore, and quickly climbed to an advantageous position at the summit of the towering heights. The approaching sail was some distance away, but the watchers could tell at a glance that it was no ordinary fishing craft.

Captain Kedge intently surveyed the stranger through his powerful glass. Finally he turned to Jack with what sounded very like an oath.

"Jest as I expected!" he snarled. "It's one of 'em durned Britishers."

"You're right, captain," agreed Jack Lantern after a careful look through the glass. "The new-comer is a man-of-war—one of the crafts which are constantly cruising along shore from St. Johns to Halifax."

The commander of the "Antelope" wore a clouded brow as he continued to watch the on-coming vessel. The latter was several miles from the shore, and holding a course exactly parallel. Apparently those on board were unaware of the American boat's proximity; but would they pass by without making the discovery?

"I reckon we're safe enuff, onless the Britishers come closer inshore," declared Captain Kedge, after gravely contemplating the situation. "The schooner is well-hidden

behind these lofty rocks, an' I don't believe yonder rascals know of this snug little haven."

"Nor are they likely to visit it, even if they do know its location," put in Jack Lantern. "Why should they suspect our presence? I'll wager the officers of yonder man-of-war would laugh a fellow to scorn, should he tell them that a Yankee craft and a Yankee crew were concealed within easy range of their ponderous guns."

"Ay, lad; but these Britishers are shrewd rascals, always popping into sight when least expected. Howsomdever, our only course is to lay low an' trust to luck for salvation."

There was considerable excitement on board the "Antelope" when it became known that a British cruiser was in the immediate vicinity. The Americans were on forbidden waters, according to the fishery laws as defined by the treaty, and every Jack Tar knew the penalty incurred, in case of discovery and capture—confiscation of property and heavy fines, with harsh and unfair treatment from over-zealous officials.

Even Captain Kedge was uneasy to a marked degree. The worthy skipper felt in much the same position as a rat in a trap. He would have been vastly more at his ease if the schooner was running out to sea, with a fair start and a favoring breeze, even at the risk of being blown out of the water by a shot from the man-of-war.

A vigilant watch was kept upon the movements of the latter vessel, which advanced very slowly, though with all sail set, for the breeze was light and rapidly failing. When she reached a position precisely opposite the reef that sheltered the Yankee craft, the wind suddenly died away altogether, and the warship lay becalmed in the offing. Immediately after her crew proceeded to cast anchor and furl the sails.

From his snug lookout, Captain Kedge viewed these operations in unmistakable disgust.

"Blow me! Why don't them fellers whistle for a breeze an' then keep on their way?" he growled. "Durned if I like the idea o' havin' sich dangerous neighbors. Their room's a blamed sight better'n their company."

Thus the worthy captain continued to fume and splutter, exasperated beyond measure at this unexpected delay. It was probable that the warship would maintain her present position for some time, as there was no sign of a breeze, and the presence of the Americans might be discovered at any moment. The situation of those aboard the "Antelope" was one of painful suspense and anxiety.

Night fell—chill, gloomy, starless! Over sea and shore hung the dense fog characteristic of Newfoundland. The breezeless air was raw and disagreeable, and searched the shivering bodies of the seamen with keen penetration. The darkness grew in intensity until objects a few fathoms away were entirely invisible.

Ordinarily, Captain Kedge would have cursed the "weather-clerk" for this unpleasant state of the atmosphere; but on this particular occasion he greeted the black-hued night with considerable elation, for, with the approach of darkness, a daring scheme was evolved in the skipper's busy brain.

Rather than remain in his present hiding-place, losing valuable time and risking ultimate discovery, the bold commander determined to work his vessel out past the anchored Britisher to the open main. Under cover of the friendly darkness, he was confident of successfully accomplishing this desperate feat, which, on a clearer night, would be utterly impracticable.

Captain Kedge communicated his intention to the crew, and preparations were at once made for the venturesome undertaking. The utter absence of wind rendered it necessary to tow the schooner, so two boats were quickly manned and sent ahead for that purpose. Stout tow-lines were attached to the vessel, then the anchor was weighed, and the boats' crews moved slowly ahead.

Every Jack Tar felt his heart in his mouth, as the saying goes, as the boats left the sheltered basin and passed through the narrow reef-bound channel to the open waters of the bay. The formidable man-of-war lay at

anchor right ahead, rocking idly on the tranquil tide; her huge shape was swallowed up by the gloom, yet the gleaming lights plainly marked her position.

The proximity of this dread foe, and the terrible results that would naturally follow discovery, inspired the Yankee fishermen with the necessary degree of caution, and steeled their nerves for the delicate and trying task before them. Their muffled oars awakened no sound as, with machine-like regularity, they worked the boats along, making each stroke with a care and deliberation well in keeping with the precariousness of the situation.

From his position in the foremost boat, Jack Lantern cautiously directed the movements of the crew, while Captain Kedge stood on deck and maintained a vigilant lookout in the direction of the British cruiser. By his side stood Earle Fairfax, no less anxious than the bluff old skipper; while Bertha Deane was in her cabin, quite ignorant of the imminent danger.

Closely hugging the shore, the advance-boats crept ahead but slowly, for the laden schooner proved no easy tow. Indeed, it seemed to the solicitous fugitives that they scarcely moved at all. A course was shaped that, if pursued, would bring the Antelope abreast of and beyond the man-of-war; but would the fleeing fishermen be permitted to reach that point of vantage unmolested?

This was a question that worried Captain Kedge not a little, as he continued to watch the British craft with anxious eyes. He was certainly justified in running away from so formidable a foe, one shot from whose mighty guns, if well-directed, could send the jaunty Antelope to the bottom.

As the moments passed, however, the skipper's fears gradually decreased, while his confidence in their safety increased correspondingly. Not a sound was heard from the cruiser's deck. It was quite apparent now that those on board were sublimely unconscious of the fact that a rich Yankee prize was slipping away under their very noses.

The Government craft now lay abeam, and each moment drew the fishermen further away; yet, Captain Kedge realized he was by no means "out of the woods."

"Them p'izen Britishers mought wake up at any minnit an' make things hot fur us," he whispered to Earle Fairfax, who stood by his side. "They do tell that them big guns o' theirs 'll carry fur miles an' miles."

"Some cannons will throw a ball eleven miles, it is claimed, though I think likely that yonder craft is far less powerfully equipped," declared the young Bostonian.

"She's mighty dangerous company, anyhow, an' I reckon it's no disgrace to show our heels. I'd give half my cargo, at this minnit, fur a breath o' wind," and the Yankee skipper gazed askance at the twinkling lights of the warship, as if expecting to see the dread cannons belch forth a death-dealing broadside of iron hail.

The crews of the advance boats continued to pull with unabated vigor, intent on putting as much open water as possible between them and the much-feared man-of-war, until at last—welcome event—a faint breeze sprung up and put an end to their labor. The fishermen were at once recalled to the schooner, and all hands made haste to hoist sail.

With the return of the wind Captain Kedge's every fear vanished instantly. His rugged face beamed with joy as he strode the deck of his peerless schooner, and saw her white wings filling with the rising breeze.

"Stay there, ye lubberly Britishers," he cried, shaking his fist toward the distant cruiser. "Yankee tars an' Yankee skill kin be counted on, ev'ry time; an' I reckon we've slipped outen the tightest box that old Tom Kedge was in. Good-by, Britishers! an' may ye always be as stupid when a Yankee craft's in danger."

Forgetting his official dignity in the exuberance of his glee, the skipper danced wildly up and down in a manner quite amusing to behold. His enthusiasm proved infective, and, for a time, as the Antelope ran briskly before the swelling breeze, there ensued upon the deck a scene as animating as it was unusual, in which even Earle Fairfax was not loth to join.

CHAPTER XVI.

CAPTAIN CLAUDE REAPPEARS.

"SAIL, oh!"

It was scarcely daylight on the morning after the providential escape of the American fishermen from the Government cruiser, when the lookout of the Antelope announced his new discovery in stentorian tones that penetrated Captain Kedge's vigilant ears and brought him quickly on deck.

His first thought was that the cruiser had followed in pursuit, having become aware of the neat trick worked by the foreign fishermen, but a glance convinced him that this fear was groundless.

The stranger was approaching from a point directly opposite the supposed position of the warship. She came on under full sail, and was bearing straight down upon the Antelope.

Carefully scrutinizing the new-comer through his powerful glass, Captain Kedge perceived that she was a schooner somewhat larger than his own vessel. A flag was flying in the breeze, and, as the craft drew nearer, he recognized the glorious Stars and Stripes.

The Yankee skipper breathed more freely when he saw that the stranger flew the emblem of his own nation. Still, there was something peculiar about her appearance, and the longer Captain Kedge looked the more he was impressed with a sense of coming evil. Finally he called his able assistant, Jack Lantern, to his side.

"What d'ye make of her, Jack?" he demanded, tersely.

The young mate's handsome face wore an interesting expression as he closely scanned the approaching schooner.

"One of our own countrymen, if you choose to judge by the colors she displays," he answered, meaningly.

"Ay, lad; she's an American, fast enuff."

"Perhaps, captain; but that remains to be seen," said Jack Lantern, quietly, and at these words the skipper stared in surprise.

"What d'ye mean, Jack?" he interrogated.

"Yonder craft flies the Stars and Stripes; yet, is it not possible to sail under false colors?"

"Nonsense, lad!" laughed Captain Kedge, though he could not wholly conceal his own uneasiness. Strange rumors of dark, mysterious doings were rife at that time, and, though the idea seemed quite absurd, Jack Lantern's suggestive words served to increase the old skipper's anxiety.

"The stranger is no fisherman—I'd stake my life on that," declared the young sailor, after another critical survey. "There's nothing about her, from stem to stern, that is common to a fishing craft; and, as we are out of the course of coast traders, what other Americans could have business in these waters?"

"Mebbe it's a crew o' young big-bugs cruisin' round for pleasure," suggested the commander. "They ginerally fit out a spick-an-span craft, cruise all over creation, get inter everybody's way, an' then wind up by runnin' aground on a sand-bar."

Jack Lantern shook his head emphatically.

"Yonder schooner is no pleasure craft," he declared: "nor are the crew amateurs, as is evident from the neat manner in which she is handled. I tell you, captain, I feel it in my bones that there is trouble ahead; and, if I held command of the 'Antelope,' I would put about and run as if Old Harry was after me."

Captain Kedge laughed at the earnest words of his *protege*. He was bravely trying to master his own uneasiness.

"I reckon we've done enuff runnin' lately, Jack. It was quite fit an' proper to sneak away from a man-o-war, but may I be eternally masted-headed if I'll turn tail to a craft of our own caliber. We're on neutral waters now, an' if yon black schooner proves to be, as you suspect, an enemy in disguise, then we'll give 'em a warm reception—keel-haul me if we don't!"

And the skipper looked proudly around upon his gallant crew, every man of which might be depended upon to render desperate resistance, should the approaching vessel prove anything but friendly.

Meantime the cause of all this doubt and conjecture had continued on her course at surprising speed. She presented a striking appearance as she bowled merrily over the water, with long black hull and gracefully-tapering masts, her snow-white canvas gleaming in the sun. Even Captain Kedge, as he admiringly noted the various beauties of the strange schooner, was forced to admit that his own beloved "Antelope" was inferior, so far as appearance was concerned.

"I can make her out quite plain, now," said Jack Lantern, who had continued to inspect the new-comer. "Everything on deck is in shipshape order—a very model of neatness. There's a pile of canvas in the bows, seemingly intended to cover and conceal some object. What few of the crew are in sight wear a dark uniform."

"Kin ye make out her name, lad?" inquired Captain Kedge.

"No sign of a name on her cutwater, sir; but she sports a queer figurehead—a winged fish!"

"What! A 'flying fish'?"

The speaker was Earle Fairfax, who had, for some time, stood unperceived behind the fishermen. He had remained an interested observer of the approaching vessel and an unseen listener to the conversation of the skipper and his mate.

It will be remembered that the journalist's involuntary visit to Captain Claude's schooner was made under cover of darkness, as was his subsequent escape, while the interim was passed in the dismal hold; therefore, he had but little opportunity to observe the peculiarities of that mysterious craft. Thus it was that the young man failed to realize the truth—never suspected that the vessel which caused so much conjecture among the Americans was the same on board which he, with Bertha Deane, had recently passed a brief captivity.

When Jack Lantern espied the peculiar figure-head, however, Earle recollected that the sailor's uniform in which he had masqueraded was marked with a similar figure, and the fact of this similitude filled him with sudden apprehension.

"Pardon the interruption, sir; but will you kindly permit me to use your glass?" he asked, eagerly, while the hand that clutched the proffered instrument fairly trembled with excitement.

As he scanned the fore-deck of the advancing schooner, the young man's dread suspicions were quickly verified, for among the distant group of seamen Captain Claude's commanding figure towered conspicuously. That formidable individual, also, held a spy-glass, which he repeatedly leveled in the direction of the Antelope.

A brief survey was enough to convince Earle Fairfax that the arch-enemy, whom he had hoped to throw effectually off the scent, was again in dangerous proximity. He at once communicated his discovery to his fishermen friends.

The latter seemed more relieved than otherwise when the identity of the stranger was thus established.

"I reckon that 'tarnal sea-shark, Cap'n Claude, has no terrors for us," declared old Tom Kedge. "His bizness seems to be the persecution o' helpless women, an' sich like dirty work—not to meddle with the Jack Tars of a Yankee craft."

"That man is a very fiend, Captain Kedge," cried Fairfax, in evident alarm. "He would hesitate at nothing. His crew outnumber yours three to one, though most of them are now concealed below, and, if he suspected that Bertha Deane was aboard this vessel, I believe he would annihilate us all to regain his lost prize."

"Which same would prove a serious task for Captain Claude o' the Flyin' Fish ter undertake—blow me if it wouldn't," chuckled the skipper, grimly. "Howsumdever, I reckon thar's no cause ter fear sich a calamity. Yon scamp, I'll wager, has no idea o' your presence: still, to make doubly sure, you had better keep outer sight till the black schooner passes. It's a good plan to avoid trouble when you kin."

This timely advice was not lost upon Earle Fairfax, who hurried below in a state of mind that was, to say the least, unpleasant. He feared the result, should Captain Claude discover that his lost captives were aboard the Antelope, for that formidable scoundrel would, without doubt, openly attack the vessel.

The commander of the fisherman, however, entertained no such fear, but, on the contrary, laughed the idea to scorn. The thought never occurred to him that this redoubtable rover, Captain Claude, had yet another mission in these northern waters besides the completion of his diabolical scheme against the Boston heiress. Had he known the full secret of that mysterious black schooner, the worthy skipper might have been justified in fleeing from her path as from a Nemesis.

The jaunty "Flying Fish," as the stranger was now known to be, bad by this time approached within hailing distance, and on a tack that would bring her close to and parallel with the "Antelope."

Suddenly the voice of Captain Claude was wafted over the water.

"Ahoy, the schooner!"

"Ahoy, ahoy!" bellowed the fisher-captain.

"What craft is that?"

"Antelope, o' Marblehead! Who are you?" returned Captain Kedge, promptly.

"United States vessel on special mission," was the evasive response that came from the lips of the black rover; and the Yankee skipper chuckled as he heard it.

"That feller is a durn sight more ingenious than truthful," he remarked to Jack Lantern. Even as he spoke, Captain Claude hailed again:

"Ahoy, ahoy!"

"Ahoy it is!"

"Will you lay to? I wish to come aboard."

"The deuce he does!" grumbled Captain Kedge. "What say ye, Jack, to the idea o' entertainin' sich suspicious visitors? My 'pinion is that Mister Claude's room is preferable to his company."

At that moment, and before Jack Lantern could reply, the Americans were made aware of an unexpected movement aboard the "Flying Fish." That craft was veered sharply about until she lay directly athwart the bows of the

"Antelope," thus necessitating a change in the course of the fishermen to avoid a collision. Immediately afterward a boat's crew put off from the black schooner, with Captain Claude in the prow.

The brow of the Yankee skipper contracted as he noted these rapid maneuvers, but it was with the utmost coolness that he gave the order to lay to.

"I reckon there's no harm in treatin' the lubbers civil until we learn what they want," he said, contemplatively. "There's only seven of 'em in yonder boat, includin' the cap'n, an' I guess there's no danger o' their cuttin' up any monkey shines with the odds ag'in 'em. Howsumdever, my lads, it's well to keep yer optics peeled, an' be ready to give 'em Hail Columby at the first sign of treachery."

With this admonition, Captain Kedge quietly awaited the arrival of his unwelcome guests. The latter approached rapidly and were soon alongside. A rope was thrown to the boat and made fast, and Captain Claude quickly scaled the schooner's side.

It was with a very confident air that the handsome dare-devil confronted the expectant group, while his keen eyes flashed boldly from face to face.

"Who is in command here?" he interrogated, sharply.

Captain Kedge stepped quickly forward.

"I reckon I sail this craft," he declared, bluntly. "How kin I serve ye?"

"Merely by answering a few questions, sir. I am in quest of information, and that is why I have boarded your vessel."

"Well, heave ahead, mate!"

"What I wish to know is this: Have you seen aught of an open boat floating in these waters, containing two occupants—a man and a woman?"

As Captain Claude asked this question, he narrowly scanned the face of the Yankee skipper; but the latter had anticipated the query and was quite prepared to meet it. His countenance assumed an expression of innocent surprise, while an incredulous laugh escaped his lips.

"What's that? A man an' a woman in an open boat? Keel-haul me if that ain't a queer question to put! Why, mate, I reckon sich sights as that are mighty uncommon this fur from land, an' partic'larly in these God-forsaken latitudes."

"That is not the point," exclaimed the commander of the "Flying Fish," making an impatient gesture. "Please answer my question plainly—yes, or no! Have you seen a craft of that description?"

"Can't say that I hev, sir," persisted Captain Kedge, with a dubious shake of the head. "The fog has b'en so blamed thick lately that we couldn't see our own topmasts, to say nothin' about castaway small boats. There, now, hev I spoken plain enuff for ye?"

"Yes; confound your Yankee prevarication—sufficiently plain to convince me that you are an infernal liar, Sir Captain," cried the rover in sudden anger. "You deny all knowledge of the parties of whom I am in search: yet it is but a few minutes since I beheld one of them standing here upon this very deck. How do you account for his presence, then?"

Captain Kedge saw that his visitor was not to be deceived, for it seemed Earle Fairfax had retired below too late to escape the Argus-eyed rover; and as further subterfuge was useless, the fisherman at once adopted different tactics.

"Look here, Mister Man in the black uniform, it strikes me that yer lingo is a durn sight too obstreperous," he cried, irately. "By what authority do ye presume ter demand an explanation of what occurs aboard my own craft? An', ag'in, s'posin' the parties ye mention are my guests, pray tell me how that fact concerns ye, Mister Flyin' Fish?"

This suddenly aggressive attitude on the part of the fisherman evidently surprised Captain Claude, besides increasing his anger, but his voice had a strangely modulated tone as he replied:

"Excuse me, captain, if I have caused myself to be regarded in the light of a trespasser. A few words of explanation may soothe your injured feelings. Permit me to say that the couple for whom I am cruising, and whom I know to be concealed aboard this vessel, are fugitives from my schooner. The man was formerly my first-mate; the woman is—my wife!"

"Your wife?"

"Ay. She habitually accompanies me on my voyages, and this trip an intimacy sprung up between her and the mate, which I sought to terminate by clapping the latter in irons; but it seems the foolish woman was deeply infatuated with the scoundrel, for one night she stole below the hatches and set him at liberty, and together they fled from the schooner in an open boat, evidently hoping to reach the not far distant coast. I pursued the runaways, but soon lost them in a fog, and have spent my subsequent time beating about in a vain search. I had just given them up for lost when we sighted your vessel, and I was overjoyed to see the familiar figure of my deserting mate as he hurried from this deck and went below. Doubtless, the run-

aways have already regaled you with a far different explanation of their strange position.

"That, captain, is the reason why I have troubled you, knowing that it is far from your intention to prevent me from recovering my false wife and her treacherous companion."

Thus spoke the cunning rover, smoothly and with all apparent sincerity, and it was amusing to note the various expressions that chased each other over the faces of his dumfounded listeners. As for Captain Kedge, he could only glare at the speaker in open-mouthed amazement, gasping for breath much after the manner of an expiring fish. It was with the utmost difficulty that he recovered from the state into which Captain Claude's audacious words had thrown him.

"Wal, skin me fur a cat-fish if I ever heard the like!" he ejaculated. "Say, cap'n, I'd like to present ye with a leather medal havin' the inscription 'Boss Liar o' Christendom.' Mast-head me if it wouldn't be appropriate."

"What's that? Do you doubt my statements?"

"Ay; that's about the size of it," declared the old skipper, boldly. "The fact is, Mister Cap'n Claude, I've heard all about yer durn cussedness, an' ye mought's well bottle up yer chin-music. The sooner ye conclude to say 'good-by' to us, the better we shall like it."

"And that will be when I have accomplished my purpose—not before," cried Captain Claude, assuming a bold front now that his attempted ruse had failed completely. "You do not know me, sir, or you would not thus seek to obstruct my path. I swear I will have my game, even though this deck runs red with blood."

He took a step forward as he spoke, but the sturdy form of Captain Kedge resolutely barred the way.

"Back, there!" thundered the intrepid commander. "This is my craft, an' flay me if I'll be bamboozled by any dirty cut-throat. Leave this schooner 'thrin two minnits, or, sure's I'm a Yankee tar, I'll heve yer worthless carcass heaved inter the sea!"

Captain Claude's answer was a taunting laugh, followed immediately by a shrill, peculiar whistle. The six sailors comprising the boat's crew had evidently been awaiting this signal, for, as it pealed from the lips of their leader, they bounded over the rail, each waving a gleaming cutlass, and rushed upon the bewildered fishermen.

CHAPTER XVII.

FLEEING FROM THE FOE.

In this time of supreme peril, when the dumfounded crew of the "Antelope" recoiled in mute horror from the flashing blades of Captain Claude's six satellites, there was one among them whose rare presence of mind did not desert him.

The young seaman, Jack Lantern, had assumed a position close by and to one side of the redoubtable sea rover, and from this point had maintained a vigilant watch upon his every movement. As that piercing signal issued from the lips of Captain Claude, to be quickly answered by the appearance of his armed minions, Jack was prompt to act an unexpected part in the stirring scene.

Grasping a pile of loose canvas that chanced to be lying near, he cast it over the head of the black leader just as the latter was about to spring upon Captain Kedge. Enveloped in the massive folds, Captain Claude was borne to the deck by the sheer weight of the sail-cloth, from which he struggled fiercely to free himself.

The diversion was indeed timely, for the intending assailants hesitated as they saw the predicament of their leader, and their momentary indecision afforded Captain Kedge an opportunity that he was quick to improve.

Emitting a yell outrivalling that of an Apache brave, the bold skipper sprang forward to meet the intruders, brandishing a handspike hurriedly snatched from the deck. A lucky blow from this weapon sent the cutlass of the nearest foe flying from his grasp, while a second stroke caused the fellow to stagger back with a shattered skull.

This daring action on the part of Captain Kedge had the happy effect of rallying his bewildered crew. With hearty cheers the fishermen rushed to support their bold commander, who was dealing lusty blows to right and left.

"Up an' at 'em, lads!" roared the intrepid skipper. "Give 'em Hail Columby! Drive ev'ry durn skunk overboard!" and this order was literally obeyed.

The fishermen were armed only with handspikes, fish-spears and similar implements that chanced to be readily available, but they greatly outnumbered the intruders, and thus atoned for the disadvantage of inferior weapons. Captain Claude had counted on intimidating the unarmed fishermen by an impetuous assault, but, thanks to Jack Lantern's quick action and the consequent discomfiture of the black rover, the latter's men had wavered just long enough to lose the advantage already gained.

After a brief but desperate struggle, the handful of invaders were driven back to the rail and forced to take refuge in their boat. In the confusion and excitement that ensued, the craft

was upset and its discomfited occupants found themselves struggling for life in the rushing waters.

Meanwhile Captain Claude continued to sprawl helplessly upon the deck, his legs and arms entangled in the heavy folds of canvas, while his frantic endeavors to extricate himself were frustrated by Jack Lantern, who danced nimbly around the heaving pile which marked the whereabouts of the overthrown freebooter. The latter exerted herculean strength, however, and at last succeeded in freeing himself from the trap; but it was only to find that the day was lost.

A horrible curse pealed from the lips of the black rover as he saw his men retreating pell-mell over the schooner's side before the united charge of the exasperated fishermen, and realized that only desperate action could save him from capture. With furious energy he shook off the grasp of Jack Lantern and darted across the deck. Several sailors saw the movement and sprung to intercept the chief, but he hurled them violently aside and in a moment bounded over the rail into the sea.

"Good riddance ter bad rubbish," commented Captain Kedge, as he witnessed the frantic flight of the black rover. "Here's hopin' the 'tarnal skunk never stops until he reaches the bottom o' Davy Jones's Locker!"

But the old skipper's uncharitable wish proved vain, for Captain Claude rose to the surface like a cock and swam swiftly to where his men were clinging to their capsized boat. Reaching this place of comparative safety, the rover turned and shook one clinched fist toward the schooner.

Not to be outdone in gesticulatory performances, Captain Kedge promptly applied his dexter thumb to his nasal organ and waved his fingers to and fro in a manner quite suggestive.

"Good-by to ye, Mister Claude!" he shouted, provokingly. "Sorry ye left us so sudden; but I reckon ye'll learn better'n to cut up any monkey shines aboard a Yankee craft, ag'in, an' partic'larly when ole Tom Kedge an' his men are on deck. How about that 'wife' o' yours? D'ye think ye'll git her right away, Mister Claude?"

Back over the tossing sea came Captain Claude's answer, shouted in a voice husky with passion:

"You laugh too soon, my brave captain. Before another sunset we shall meet again, and force shall succeed where strategy has failed. Beware of the 'Flying Fishermen!'"

The Yankee skipper's response was another derisive gesture, and he then turned to direct the movements of his crew. The "Antelope" was put about on a course that would lead her away from the dread black schooner, from which a second boat was now putting off to pick up the crestfallen commander and his associates.

As the jaunty fishing-craft bowled merrily away before a freshening breeze, those on board found time to discuss the startling events that had proved so decided an exception to their usually monotonous existence. It was found that none of the crew had sustained mortal injury, though several brave fellows bore cuts of more or less severity resulting from that brief but furious encounter. One of the "Flying Fishermen," felled by a blow from old Tom's vigorous arm, was left behind by his comrades; he proved to be but slightly injured, and was immediately relegated to the hold in irons.

The Americans had good reason to congratulate themselves for the able manner in which they had repulsed that desperate assault, yet there was a prevailing sentiment that more trouble would follow. From the parting threat of Captain Claude, it was feared that, far from being disheartened by his recent rough experience, the failure would only stimulate him to further exertions in the attempt to regain his lost prize.

This opinion was strongly entertained by the young Bostonian, Earle Fairfax, who had hurried on deck at the commencement of hostilities, though his services were unnecessary, and was now intently watching the progress of the boat sent off to pick up the capsized rovers. Dreading the fury of Captain Claude, whose indefatigable persistency in prosecuting his devilish designs was by this time pretty thoroughly demonstrated, Earle felt justified in hoping that the arch-enemy would become exhausted and sink ere assistance reached him.

But Captain Claude was not inclined to perish in that ignominious fashion; he clung to the overturned craft with a tenacious grip until the rescuers came up and hauled him into their boat, together with his chilled and exhausted followers.

Aboard the "Antelope" all eyes were directed upon the movements of the "Flying Fishermen," and the Americans were soon convinced that their fears were well-grounded, for no sooner did the boat containing the rescued rovers reach the black schooner than that vessel was put about and sent flying in pursuit.

Much delay had been caused, however, by these preliminary maneuvers, while the same time was duly improved by the fugitive fishermen; so, when the "Flying Fish" at length got

under way, her intended prey had gained a fair start and was running rapidly before the wind.

The Yankee skipper was in his element, now, and his gray eyes sparkled enthusiastically as the stanch "Antelope" leaped from crest to crest, her snowy canvas bellying in the breeze. Captain Kedge reposed great confidence in the racing qualities of his own pet craft, and was inclined to laugh at the idea of being overhauled by the piratical black schooner.

"Our salvation lies in keepin' yon rascals at a distance, for I'll allow we're no match for 'em at close quarters, considerin' they outnumber us an' are armed to the teeth," admitted the commander, joining Jack Lantern and the young Bostonian who stood aft together, anxiously noting the progress of the foe.

"And are you confident that your vessel is capable of maintaining its present safe position?" demanded Earle Fairfax, solicitously.

"I tell ye, the 'Antelope' kin show a clean pair o' heels to any craft under the sun," the old skipper positively declared. "Only let this breeze continue, an' shiver me if we don't run clean outer sight an' hearin' o' yonder dirty pirut!"

But alas! for Captain Kedge and his overweening confidence. He did not estimate the sailing abilities of his vessel too highly, perhaps; but he did underrate the power and resources of the pursuing foe. The race was not to be, as he expected, a mere question of speed, and this fact was soon demonstrated.

The "Flying Fishermen" were observed to be in a state of great activity. Men hurried to and fro, while a number of the crew were busy with the pile of canvas which had already attracted Jack Lantern's attention. The removal of this sail-cloth disclosed a long black object that had hitherto remained concealed, but which was now quickly dragged forward by ready hands; and in a few moments the astonished fugitives saw the muzzle of a ponderous cannon frowning threateningly upon them from the bows of the black schooner.

At almost the same instant the "Stars and Stripes" that had continued to wave from Captain Claude's vessel suddenly came down by the run, and in its place arose a jet-black flag bearing in its center a blood-red "Flying Fish."

Such warlike demonstrations could not fail to create a decided sensation among those aboard the "Antelope," whose former feeling of security at once gave way to consternation at this latest manifestation of the enemy's power. That Captain Claude possessed a cannon was a fact hitherto unsuspected.

"Shades o' Cap'n Kidd!" gasped the Yankee skipper, pale with excitement.

"Hev we b'en carried back, by some magic power, to the days o' piracy? First 'twas cutlasses, now a bow-chaser an' a black flag! What in the name of ole Neptune 'll cum next?"

"Possibly a pleasant walk over the plank, should we be captured," suggested Jack Lantern, grimly. "Yonder craft has 'pirate' stamped all over her, and I'm blessed if the mere sight of her doesn't send a cold chill down my spine."

The "Flying Fish" certainly did present an ominous aspect as she skimmed swiftly in pursuit, her long, narrow shape cutting the water like a knife, her deck alive with dark-browed men, while aloft that buccaneerish black banner flaunted threateningly in the breeze.

"Surely the miscreants will not dare to fire upon us," exclaimed Earle Fairfax, hopefully. "There must be a limit to Captain Claude's audacity, and these piratical demonstrations are probably made for the mere purpose of frightening us into submission."

At that instant, as if to give the lie to the young man's assertion, a thunderous report was heard and a solid shot hurtled through the air, descending to one side and considerably beyond the scudding "Antelope."

It was evident that the shot was purposely sent wide of the mark, merely to convince the fugitives that they were within easy range, and as a gentle reminder of what might be expected should they persist in flight.

The Americans, however, were not to be intimidated, and the nimble Antelope was held steadily upon her course in utter disregard of Captain Claude's warning; but the Flying Fishermen plainly meant business, for in a moment there came a second shot from the big bow-chaser.

This time the missile hurtled viciously past the fishing-vessel, so near that those on board could hear the sound made by its rapid passage through the air.

"By Jupiter! that was a close call, I'll allow. The whiz of the ball in such dangerous proximity was enough to make one's flesh creep," exclaimed Earle Fairfax, uneasily, for this was the first time in his experience, that he had posed as a target for a death-dealing cannon-ball, and it was but natural that the sensation should be as disagreeable as it was novel.

Indeed, there was not one upon the Antelope's deck who failed to participate in the general consternation.

Captain Kedge, however, possessed sufficient self-command to conceal his anxiety beneath a mantle of apparent unconcern.

"Let 'em peg away to their hearts' content, blame their ugly hides," he ejaculated. "Devils though they are, they shall find we're not afraid of 'em. Only give us a continuation o' this stiff breeze, an' keel-haul me if we don't run straight away from ther Flyin' Fishermen, for it's ten to one that they kin pepper away all day without hittin' us, though I'll allow that last shot cum tolerably close."

These assuring words had but little effect; indeed, it is doubtful if the worthy skipper himself really entertained the hope that his words implied. If so, the near future was to prove most emphatically that he had underestimated the marksmanship of the enemy.

What a strange spectacle was presented by these handsome vessels as they forged swiftly through the heavy seas, one pursuing the other—the hawk and the dove—while from the bows of the pursuer came frequent flashes of flame and smoke, as, by the persuasive influence of solid shot, she sought to check the flight of her prey! A sight so suggestive of the days of Kidd and Lafitte, so foreign to our own era of law and order! Would it not have opened the sleepy eyes of certain plenipotentiaries, could they have been there to see?

It could be seen through the glass that Captain Claude himself was at the gun, manipulating it with a skill and coolness that implied previous experience. Indeed a portion of the rover's varied career had been upon the Southern battle-fields, where, during the "late unpleasantness," he had rendered signal service as a gunner under the Confederate flag, acquiring a proficiency that was now to serve him well in the accomplishment of his diabolical purpose. Shot after shot was sent with an accuracy that was remarkable, considering the distance and the erratic movements of both vessels; and Captain Kedge was not slow to realize that he had slightly underrated the enemy's skill in gunnery.

It was obvious that Captain Claude aimed to cripple the fleeing schooner by shooting away her spars and rigging, for every shot flew high above the deck, and dangerously close to the mark; but "a miss is as good as a mile," and the anxious fishermen rejoiced, as, one after another, the iron missiles continued to wing their flight without striking a vulnerable part.

As the Antelope fleetly pursued her course, still unchecked by the storm of shot, those aboard the peerless craft were plunged into a state of terrible suspense.

What seemed a miraculous dispensation of Providence, had enabled the fugitives, so far, to escape the enemy's fire uninjured; but it was improbable that this rare good fortune would long continue.

The commander of the Antelope had hoped for assistance from the fact that, in these much-frequented waters, it was quite possible to fall in with some vessel which, in this particular case, might prove a veritable friend in need; but incessant scrutiny failed to reveal the longed-for sight of an approaching sail to gladden the eyes of the anxious fishermen. Save for the principal actors in this wild life-drama, the broad Atlantic was utterly deserted.

So, on flew the jaunty Antelope, and on, in swift pursuit, sped the somber craft of the Flying Fisherman, until at last—

Crash! A ponderous ball from the bow-chaser passed squarely through the mainmast at a distance of scarcely ten feet above the deck. After repeated hair-breadth misses, Captain Claude had at length succeeded in reaching the mark; and a more disastrous shot could not have been delivered.

The slender mast, half-severed and terribly weakened by the blow, first trembled, then swayed majestically to and fro, and finally, borne down by the tremendous weight upon it, fell sidewise with a terrific crash, leaving the crippled craft at the mercy of the Flying Fishermen.

CHAPTER XVIII. PRISONERS.

WHEN the shattered mainmast suddenly went by the board, there ensued upon the schooner's deck a scene of wild confusion. The Antelope careened violently, and for a moment seemed doomed to destruction; but the stentorian voice of Captain Kedge was heard calling all hands to clear away the wreck, and his sturdy crew instantly sprung to their task, working with an indomitable energy that soon freed the craft from the cumbersome mass of debris.

This operation, however, had consumed valuable time, which was duly improved by the Flying Fishermen, and their craft was by this time dangerously near. The firing abruptly ceased after that last effective shot, for evidently the rovers were content with the advantage gained thereby. They advanced with appalling rapidity, giving no utterance to their exultation, but maintaining a grim, threatening silence that proved equally impressive and awe-inspiring.

Crippled beyond repair by the loss of important sails, the Antelope's headway was now deadened to such an extent that she seemed to hardly move at all, as compared with the race-horse speed of her pursuers. That the latter would

quickly overhaul their prey, under these unfortunate circumstances, was now a foregone conclusion. With flight practically ended, Captain Kedge at once prepared for vigorous defense, for the idea of tame surrender never entered the intrepid skipper's head.

The Americans were sadly deficient in weapons with which to repel the inevitable attack of the Flying Fishermen. A minute search revealed nothing that could be used save at very close quarters; and the nondescript array of harpoons, oars, handspikes and the like, together with two cutlasses left behind by the rovers during their first unsuccessful assault, seemed indeed sorry weapons with which to meet a superior force of desperate men, armed to the teeth.

And now the Flying Fish came swiftly up on the helpless schooner's lee. Captain Claude stood grimly by the rail, speaking-trumpet in hand.

"Aho, there!" he hailed, triumphantly. "What d'ye think of the situation now, my fine captain? You'll admit that we have you completely at our mercy, and, if so inclined, can shoot your craft to pieces at leisure. Of course you'll spare us that painful necessity by submitting at once without further resistance."

As Captain Kedge deigned no response to this suggestion, the rover chief again hailed, impatiently:

"Will you surrender?"

"By what right and in whose name do you demand it?" came from the commander of the Antelope.

"By the right of might, and in the name of the 'Flying Fishermen'!" was the grim reply.

"Again I ask: Will you submit to the inevitable, and become the prisoners of Captain Claude, or do you prefer that the deck of your schooner shall run red with your own life's blood?"

"Avast, ye infernal pirate!" thundered the fearless skipper. "I tell ye thar's no sich word as 'surrender' in ole Tom Kedge's vocabulary. Do your worst, Sir Lord-of-the-Black-Flag. Ye'll find ev'ry man Jack of us ready to fight to the death in defense of our own lives and a woman's honor!"

As these determined words fell from the lips of brave Captain Kedge, his hardy crew united in a spontaneous burst of wild applause.

"Hooray for our gallant captain! Death before surrender!" was the cry that echoed and re-echoed over the shimmering ocean. It reached the ears of the rover chief, and warned him that his intended prey would offer stubborn resistance; but his confidence was in no wise decreased, and preparations were at once made to complete the work of subjugation.

Three boats were speedily launched from the Flying Fish, each filled to its utmost capacity with well-armed desperadoes. Captain Claude had profited by his recent experience, and now precluded all possible chance of failure by placing his entire force in the attacking-party, save a few men left to manage the schooner.

Anxious, but still unterrified, the little band of defenders watched the enemy's vigorous preparations for conflict. Gallant Captain Kedge addressed his men in a characteristic speech, dwelling briefly on their desperate situation, and earnestly exhorting them to stand firm and defend the craft to the last. This admonition was quite unnecessary, for not a man in that hardy crew quailed before the coming danger. Answering their commander's words by rousing cheers, they grasped their scanty weapons, and firmly awaited the onset.

Earle Fairfax occupied a conspicuous place among the devoted band of defenders, despite Captain Kedge's earnest request that he should remain below with Bertha. The young man's blood was up, and he indignantly rejected the idea of tamely retreating and leaving his fishermen friends to fight in his defense. Of all others, he had ample reasons for wishing to oppose the onslaught of that ocean bloodhound, Captain Claude.

The enemy advanced rapidly and silently, and, as they neared the schooner, demonstrated their reasons for attacking in boats, instead of placing the Flying Fish directly alongside. The three boats now separated; one made for the Antelope's stern, another kept on until it completely circumnavigated the larger craft, while the third boat continued its original course. In this manner the freebooters planned to attack simultaneously from three different sides, thus necessitating a corresponding division of the fishermen's force.

A few rifles or revolvers in experienced hands might have frustrated this movement; but, alas, what innocent seafarer, in these days of law and order, could foresee the need of numbering firearms among his fishing paraphernalia? The Americans could only stand by in a state of utter helplessness, while the "Flying Fishermen" leisurely assumed their several advantageous positions.

At a preconcerted signal the three boats' crews suddenly dashed upon the schooner. Scaling the sides like monkeys, they swarmed over the rail, only to be met by the valiant defenders. Then followed an encounter fierce and desperate, though naturally of short duration.

It is needless to say that the Americans acquitted themselves nobly in this hour of peril, fighting with an ardor that, under more propitious conditions, must have turned the tide of battle in their favor. Captain Kedge, bold and undaunted, was ever in the thickest of the fray, encouraging his men by both words and deeds; while Jack Lantern led one division of the crew and performed prodigies of valor. Earle Fairfax, too, proved a formidable combatant, dealing vigorous blows to right and left.

Yet, with the odds nearly three to one against the fishermen, to say nothing of their inferior weapons, it was no more than natural that the unequal conflict should ultimately result disastrously.

One by one the brave fellows were struck down and overpowered, until the last man was subdued, and victory rested with the "Flying Fishermen." The Americans had made a glorious resistance, but in vain, and Captain Claude was at last triumphant. The conflict, happily for all concerned, was attended by no loss of life, though scarcely a man on either side escaped injuries of more or less severity.

Captain Claude was naturally elated at his long-deferred victory. He caused the pinioned crew of the Antelope to be arranged in a row upon the deck, and then regarded them with the arrogant air of a master.

"Well, gentlemen, indications point plainly to the fact that you are my prisoners," he exclaimed, coolly. "When I left this craft so precipitately a short time since, I swore that ere another sunset I would again cross your deck in the role of a conqueror. You see I have kept my word."

"It warn't our fault you did, I reckon," retorted old Tom Kedge. "Howsumdever, yer triumph 'll be short-lived. Piracy is a leetle out of date, an' there's a nice strong rope waitin' somewhere that'll reward ye for this dirty piece of work."

"Have a care, my dear captain, how you choose your words; else you may be the first to prove the efficacy of the treatment you suggest by executing an aerial dance from yonder yard-arm. The 'Flying Fishermen' of Newfoundland brook no impertinence from their prisoners."

"Ho, ho! Now I reckon as how a cat kin look at a king," retorted Captain Kedge, in no wise abashed. "I wasn't reared at sea to be skeered of a shark. We're in your power, I'll allow; but we're ready to face the music, an' kin expect nothin' but the wu'st treatment from a durned pirate!"

"Pirate? Pardon me, captain, if I deny that accusation. The 'Flying Fishermen' are organized upon purely patriotic principles, and I fancy their work is conducted fairly, as viewed from an unprejudiced standpoint. The pursuit and subsequent capture of your craft was in strict accordance with the sworn purpose of our league."

"I see you are still ignorant of the truth; so allow me to say a few words which will, I trust, dispel the cloud of mystery and enlighten you as to the real nature of the situation. It is quite unnecessary to dwell upon the relations that at the present time exist between the United States and British America regarding the coast fisheries of this vicinity. You, an American fisherman, are doubtless well acquainted with the subject. You are aware that the Yankees habitually repair to these waters, their numbers multiplying so rapidly that they have practically gained control of the great Banks, crowding therefrom hosts of native fishermen who should of right enjoy the exclusive benefits of these superior fishing-grounds. Moreover, not content with these advantages, you Americans seek to extend your lines of invasion still further by audaciously trespassing upon our very coast waters, deliberately violating the three-mile limit law prescribed by international treaty, and generally evading the few government cruisers detailed to protect our coast."

"So, driven to desperation by this constantly-increasing influx of foreign fishermen, and seeing no prospect of immediate relief by the interference of a listless Government, the injured fishermen of Newfoundland feel that the time has come to take the matter into their own hands. They have declared war upon the Yankee intruders, and, to prosecute their work more vigorously, have equipped a model schooner and manned her with a picked crew. I was fortunate enough to receive the command, and, being a Newfoundlander by birth, my zeal is stimulated by a patriotic love of country, in addition to the laudable desire to earn my salary. We are known as the 'Flying Fishermen,' and our purpose is to prey upon all Yankee fishing-craft, whenever and wherever found. The 'three-mile limit' does not enter our calculations. By striking boldly and frequently we mean to inaugurate a veritable reign of terror among the invaders, and teach them to keep a proper distance in the future."

"You may be sure, captain, that I exercise the utmost caution in my movements, generally planning to surprise my prey under cover of darkness; but in your particular case I deviated from the rule because I had a double object in effecting this capture. When approaching your craft to reconnoiter, I saw on board the

parties of whom I was in search, and at once resolved to force the matter, as I feared if we delayed you might scent danger and possibly give us the slip. The result is obvious. Not only is my own purpose accomplished, but the 'Flying Fishermen' have acquired a rich prize in the form of this jaunty schooner, which, but for your perverseness in refusing to surrender my former prisoners, might still be free and uninjured."

"Now, dear captain, I trust you may appreciate my courtesy in thus condescending to favor you with a full explanation; and also that, having learned the true nature of the situation, you will now bottle up your wrath and patiently abide the result."

Captain Claude's explanatory speech, while fully elucidating much that was heretofore inexplicable, did not serve to place the captives more at their ease, as might well be anticipated. There was no reason to doubt the truth of these startling statements, and the Yankee captain was pardonable for wishing himself well out of his trying predicament.

"Wal, cap'n, we're much obleeged to ye for what ye call yer courtesy in thus informin' us jest what sort of rascals we've got to deal with," said Captain Kedge, wisely curbing his wrath and assuming an indifference which, however, he was far from feeling. "I reckon as how we're caught like fish in a net, an' there's nothin' left for us to do but to grin an' bear it until our turn comes ag'in. Howsumdever, bein' yer in sich a condescendin' mood, there's one point on which I'd like enlightenment. Pr'aps ye kin tell me what is the next act on the programme. What d'ye propose to do with the craft which ye have seized in sich a high-handed manner?"

"A proper question, captain, which I am quite willing to answer," said the rover chief, good-humoredly. "Under the laws of the Flying Fishermen your vessel is forever forfeited, becoming the property of our league."

"And we—myself an' crew?"

"Must meet the punishment inflicted upon all intruders, which is—"

"What?" demanded Captain Kedge, impatiently, as the freebooter hesitated.

"Well, captain, I think I will withhold that information for the present. You will learn your fate in due time," and with these tantalizing words Captain Claude turned away, leaving his questioner as ignorant as before regarding the doom held in store for himself and friends by the terrible Flying Fishermen.

The leader now ordered his prisoners sent below, and this movement was promptly executed. Captain Kedge was the last to leave the deck, and as his gallant associates were led away, he became aware of a circumstance that had hitherto escaped attention.

Jack Lantern was *not* among the captives, but had disappeared in an unaccountable manner. It was to be feared that the young sailor had been knocked overboard and drowned during that desperate hand-to-hand encounter.

Captain Kedge was forced to apprehend the worst concerning the fate of his beloved *protege*, and it was with a heavy heart that he followed his men below—a prisoner aboard his own vessel.

CHAPTER XIX.

A STEP TOWARD FREEDOM.

HAD Captain Kedge known the truth, he would have felt a trifle less uneasy regarding Jack Lantern, for that youth was still alive and uninjured, although his situation was scarcely better than that of his friends in the hold.

Battling bravely in the thick of the fight, the brave sailor had suddenly received a heavy blow on the head which caused him to fall backward to the deck, temporarily deprived of consciousness. When he opened his eyes it was to see his associates surrounded upon all sides by the triumphant assailants who swarmed in irresistible numbers upon the deck of the ill-starred craft.

Discreetly concluding that further resistance on his part was entirely out of the question, Jack's first impulse was to seek a place of safety. The combatants were between him and the companionway, precluding all chance of escape in that direction; so, on hands and knees, he crept stealthily forward.

Thanks to the wild confusion which at that moment prevailed, the young sailor reached the bows and found a hiding-place unperceived by friends or foes. This movement was hardly executed when the conflict ceased altogether, and Captain Claude's brotherhood remained masters of the situation.

Ensnared behind a pile of old sails and cordage, Jack Lantern could hear but not see what followed the capitulation of his friends. Every word of the rover chief's explanatory speech was perfectly audible. Then came the order consigning the prisoners to the hold; and the subsequent tramp of feet told the concealed listener that this movement was being put into immediate execution.

The removal of the captives was but the first of a series of vigorous actions on the part of the "Flying Fishermen." The black schooner was signaled to lay alongside, and while this was

being done all traces of the recent encounter were carefully removed from the deck of the "Antelope." Then, as the latter vessel in her crippled condition could not keep pace with the black schooner, she was taken in tow by that craft which was then immediately pointed to the northward.

Captain Claude's objective point was the Newfoundland Coast, only a short sail distant, yet there was a possibility that in the mean time some Government cruiser might chance upon the scene, in which case an investigation would probably follow which would result disastrously to the "Flying Fishermen." This thought caused the bold rover chief considerable uneasiness, but the approach of night was a point in his favor, and he hoped to reach his destination in safety ere daylight dawned.

The freebooters' maneuvers were readily divined by Jack Lantern, as he lay low in his narrow, uncomfortable hiding-place. He, too, rejoiced that night was near, for under cover of darkness he hoped to accomplish the liberation of his friends.

To achieve this purpose single-handed, against a horde of well-armed and vigilant foes, seemed almost a hopeless task, but the intrepid sailor boy, far from being discouraged at the gloomy outlook, was eager to make the attempt. His chief anxiety was lest the enemy should chance upon his hiding-place, ere the coming of darkness enabled him to leave it.

Fortunately for him the "Flying Fishermen" failed to suspect the truth. Not knowing the exact numbers of the American crew, and having failed to notice Jack Lantern in particular, the rovers naturally supposed every man of the vanquished party to be safe below the hatches. Thanks to this false belief, the young seaman was permitted to remain undisturbed in his place of concealment, until, after long hours of suspense, he at length determined the time was ripe for action.

Night had fallen—one of the dark, starless, foggy nights so common in these dreary latitudes. As Jack Lantern crept stealthily from his cramped and narrow quarters, he could barely distinguish the tall spars of the advance schooner rising phantom-like in the gloom. Upon the deck of the "Antelope," as she followed meekly in the black schooner's wake, utter silence prevailed.

With every sense on the alert, Jack moved cautiously aft. A keen survey convinced him that, while a large proportion of the outlaw force had returned to their own vessel, still enough remained upon the prize schooner to render the intended rescue a task of colossal magnitude, indeed, seemingly impossible. He could distinguish, on either hand, the shadowy forms of the watch, as they stood silently at their respective stations. To reach his cherished goal—the companionway—it was necessary to elude these sharp-eyed sentries, some of whom were scarcely a dozen feet away. Discovery meant certain capture, if not death!

Yet the daring boy never faltered; the thought of his friends in captivity rendered him impervious to fear. He dropped upon hands and knees and made his way, inch by inch, across the slippery deck. Never did Indian warrior, creeping upon his foe, display such marvelous nerve and cunning as did this intrepid sailor, bent on his mission of rescue.

Alas! for Jack Lantern and his well-laid plans. It was surely no fault of his that his desperate effort resulted disastrously. Almost within reach of the longed-for goal, his knees encountered a stray belaying-pin, thrown upon the deck by a careless hand. The implement rolled quickly from under, and as a result he was thrown clumsily forward.

Lying motionless where he fell, hardly daring to draw breath in his anxiety, the luckless sailor hoped against hope that the slight noise made by that awkward stumble had failed to attract attention. The nearest outlaw, however, was possessed of remarkably acute ears, and Jack's heart fairly stood still as he saw the fellow swiftly approaching, evidently bent on investigation. Discovery was inevitable; but in this time of hazard, the youth quickly hit upon an expedient. He scrambled hurriedly to his feet, just as the seaman came up and roughly demanded:

"What the blazes is the matter here? Have ye lost yer sea-legs, ye durned lubber?"

"Avast, there, mate! Stow away your jaw-tackle, an' show me the blasted son-of-a-sea-cook who left that marlin'spike under foot, durn his 'tarnal hide!" answered Jack Lantern promptly, in a gruff, angry tone.

It was an audacious ruse, but one that promised to result successfully, for the perfectly natural speech and manner of the young sailor served to disarm suspicion. Evidently satisfied that it was one of his comrades who addressed him, the freebooter, with a joking remark, was about to turn away, when suddenly the moon emerged from behind the thick bank of clouds where it had long been concealed, and illumined the scene with its mellow beams.

Jack Lantern recoiled in dismay, for in the moonlight he now stood fully revealed to the astonished gaze of his foe. The latter sprung forward with a sharp cry, at the same moment

snatching a pistol from his belt; but, ere he could raise the weapon, a clinched fist met him between the eyes, and he measured his length upon the deck.

But the remainder of the watch were aroused, and dark forms rushed upon the discomfited fisher-boy, who, still thinking only of his friends, darted ahead in a vain attempt to reach the place where they were confined.

Too late! Burly forms loomed up before him, and blocked the way, and, turning again, it was to find himself hemmed in on every side by eager foes. Completely surrounded, and with the odds a dozen to one, there could be but one result to Jack Lantern's unlucky adventure; but the bold lad's blood was up, and he meant to sell his freedom dearly. For the next ten seconds his energetic fists flew as many times in various directions, and his well-directed blows speedily made an opening in the cordon of shouting freebooters. Then, free for the moment from his enemies, Jack darted forward to the foremast, hotly pursued.

Springing into the rigging, he mounted with the agility of a squirrel, up, up until the foretop was reached, when he paused and looked down upon the outlaws, who were gleefully contemplating their victim from below.

At that moment Captain Claude appeared on deck, aroused by the tumult. The situation was quickly explained to him.

"So the coon is treed, eh?" he laughed in elation. "Good! But what are ye all standing here for? Climb aloft, one o' ye, an' bring him down!"

In obedience to the captain's command, a brawny fellow sprung into the rigging. Meanwhile, Jack Lantern had not been idle. He proposed to resist capture until the last, though, armed only with a small clasp-knife, his defense could be but feeble at the best.

Just then his gaze fell upon a heavy block which was lashed within easy reach. He quickly cut it loose and with both hands held it above the outlaw who was ascending rapidly.

"Back! back! if you value your life!" he cried resolutely.

But the ruffian paused only a moment; his comrades below were urging him on, and, confident in his ability to dodge the block at the proper time, he continued to advance upon the beleaguered fisher-boy.

The latter coolly waited until his foe was within a dozen feet, then, seeing the fellow was bound to ignore his warning, he hurled the missile downward with all the force he could muster.

In vain did the doomed freebooter try to evade that terrible instrument of destruction. Jack Lantern's aim was unerring, and the heavy block crushed the fellow's skull like an egg-shell. He fell heavily to the deck, carrying with him several comrades who had impatiently started to climb to his assistance.

Confusion reigned among the ruffians at this unexpected reverse, and for a time the intrepid young fisherman was master of the situation.

Cursing like a fiend at the loss of one of his best men, Captain Claude fiercely ordered his crew to renew the assault.

"Up with you, men!" he roared. "You are ten to one, and the lad is now unarmed. Down with the infernal rascal, and I swear he shall walk the plank to atone for the death of our comrade. Up, up, I say!"

Thus incited to renewed efforts, the outlaws again advanced to secure the daring youth who clung to the mast far above them. The latter was fully prepared to meet this new attack, for the brief lull in hostilities had enabled him to devise another weapon as formidable as it was novel. Cutting a piece several feet in length from a convenient rope, he knotted one end, then added knot after knot until the whole formed a solid ball, a blow from which was liable to be felt by the luckless recipient.

Grasping this novel slung-shot with one hand, and with the other clinging to the swaying mast, Jack quietly awaited the renewal of hostilities. He was confident of holding his present position against the enemy, for much of the rigging had been shot away, and therefore but one man could ascend at a time.

Up clambered the "Flying Fishermen," a wiry, agile fellow in advance. They fondly believed the youth to be weaponless, and consequently experienced a great surprise at what followed.

Swish! came the knotted rope's-end through the air, swung by an arm that never faltered, and the foremost outlaw got the full benefit of that terrific blow. Struck squarely upon the temple, the fellow's hold relaxed and he fell a dead weight against his follower. The latter, in turn, was swept from his position, as was also the next, while the rearmost men saved themselves from being converted into ninepins by jumping ignominiously to the deck.

Captain Claude was fairly beside himself with rage to see his crew again summarily repulsed.

"The fiends take you all for a lot o' cowardly curs!" he roared. "Shame on you for running from a single foe—a mere lad at that! Where is your pride? Have you lost your wonted valor?"

A mocking laugh came from the vicinity of the foretop, where the dark form of Jack Lantern was seen to cling.

"Why not test your own courage, my gallant cut-throat?" sung out the fisher-boy, tauntingly. "Come up, if you dare, and receive a dose of rope's-end on your cowardly carcass!"

Stung to madness by the defiant speech, Captain Claude whipped a revolver from his sash, and leveled it at the dimly-outlined form in the rigging.

"Curse you! Down you come, alive or dead!" he hissed. "Take my compliments, my fine fellow, in the shape of this bit of cold lead!"

There was a brief stillness. The moonlight suddenly brightened, bringing into ghostly distinctness the spars and rigging of the schooner and the devoted lad who clung desperately aloft. Captain Claude's eye flashed over the pistol-barrel, and the hand that held the weapon was as firm as steel.

Crack! The report echoed and re-echoed over the silent waters. Jack Lantern was seen to start and clap his hand to his head; then, as the "Antelope" careened violently to starboard, his hold relaxed, his form shot down, down through space, and, barely grazing the schooner's side, was swallowed up by the angry sea!

CHAPTER XX.

CAPTOR AND CAPTIVE.

LAUGHING in fiendish glee, Captain Claude saw his luckless victim shoot like an arrow from that giddy height and disappear from view.

"Not a very bad shot, that, I reckon," he grimly declared, restoring the smoking weapon to its place. "Between a dose of cold lead and a salt sea bath, I hardly imagine our young friend, the fisher-boy, will cause us further annoyance. Now, then, lads, get back to your stations: and keep your weather-eye open, lest there be more of the rascals concealed aboard who have eluded your vigilance."

So saying, the commander sauntered leisurely away. Those of his followers who had come to grief at the hands of Jack Lantern were speedily borne to the fore-castle, and in a few moments the scene resumed its former tranquillity.

As the disabled vessel plowed steadily in the wake of her light-winged consort, Captain Claude continued to pace to and fro upon the silent deck, for to a man in his condition of mind sleep was entirely out of the question.

It is safe to assert that a more self-satisfied individual never existed than was the redoubtable chief of the "Flying Fishermen" in this his hour of triumph. Was it the knowledge that his nefarious band had acquired a fresh prize that caused his heart to swell with savage joy? No! That matter was of very trivial importance, for with the capture of the fisher-craft had come another and to him far more momentous triumph.

Poor, persecuted Bertha Deane, after many vicissitudes, had once more fallen into the hands of her relentless foe; and small wonder that the latter rejoiced at the strange caprice of Fortune which enabled him to resume the prosecution of his villainous scheme.

Captain Claude did not hasten to revisit his fair prisoner; he was satisfied, for the nonce, to know that she was safe enough in the schooner's cabin. With his evil brain busily at work arranging plans for the near future, he continued to walk the deck until the gray light of morning began to deepen in the eastern skies.

But as the morning advanced, the rover finally concluded the time was ripe for an interview with his beautiful captive, and so, chuckling in anticipation of an interesting sequel, he leisurely made his way below.

The cabin door was fastened; but, after repeated knocks had elicited no response, the adventurer threw his massive shoulders against the frail barrier, and it yielded with a crash.

Captain Claude strode triumphantly into the room to behold Bertha Deane crouching in the furthest corner, pale and bewildered.

Poor girl! Not knowing which side had triumphed in the battle just concluded, she had hoped against hope that her friends might prove victorious; but, as the hateful figure of her foe darkened the doorway, she realized that she had hoped in vain, and that she was once more a helpless prisoner.

"Good-evening, fair lady!" the rover saluted, his flushed face and dancing eyes indicating his exultance as he confronted the affrighted heirless. "As you seemed disinclined to answer my knock, I took the liberty of walking in without further ceremony. I trust you will pardon my intrusion."

"Fate, it seems, has ruled that our paths should converge again," he continued, his opening remarks producing no reply. "I was exceedingly disappointed, Miss Deane, to learn that you, my honored guest, should disappreciate my hospitality to such an extent as to steal away at dead of night without even bidding your host an affectionate adieu. Indeed, I was so grief-stricken that I must soon have perished of melancholy, had not kind Fortune, pitying my despair, reconducted me to the presence of my beautiful bride to be. My supreme happiness at this meeting may readily be imagined, and, no doubt, the feeling is reciprocal. Is it not?"

"Scoundrel! Rather would I see death, itself!"

at the doorway than your detested shape," cried the fair girl, roused by the taunting words of her merciless persecutor. "I had prayed never to see your face again. Merciful Heaven! Am I never to escape your persecution?"

"Echo answers 'never,' dear lady," returned the adventurer, coolly. "I am absolutely indefatigable with such a peerless prize at stake. You are again my honored guest, and I shall take care that you do not depart again without my knowledge and consent. This time you need expect no chivalrous lover to the rescue, for at present his power is exceedingly limited, I assure you."

"What mean you?" demanded Bertha, tremulously, for the allusion to Earle Fairfax renewed her apprehension regarding the young man's fate. "Villain, have you killed him?"

"Well, no; I plead not guilty to so enormous an offense. Truth to tell, your friends are all alive and well; but they are so situated that assistance from them is as little to be expected as that the sun will shine upon us to-night."

"Thank Heaven, they are safe! They will yet come to my rescue, and mete out to you the punishment you deserve."

Captain Claude laughed derisively.

"I'd gamble my last cent that you'll never see your devoted friends again," he said. "I tell you, girl, the stake for which I have been playing is won at last. Nothing on earth can thwart me, now. You ought to be convinced by this time that fate intends you to become Mrs. Claude Kingsley, and, like a sensible woman, should submit to the inevitable without further resistance."

"That is your opinion, sir; not mine. Although I am again your captive, do not suppose that I fear your boasted power. I defy you, contemptible scoundrel that you are!"

"Ha, ha! Spoken like a true heroine, I declare," exclaimed the rover, laughingly. "However, the defiant attitude which you assume is hardly warrantable under the present circumstances. You should bear in mind that you are absolutely powerless, and that any further stubbornness on your part will only serve to make my triumph sweeter in the end."

"Now, without further badinage, allow me to say a few words regarding the immediate future, in which, no doubt, you feel a lively interest. Being the party most particularly concerned, it is quite proper that you should be enlightened in good season; so, with your kind attention, I will briefly explain."

"Another sunset will find us at a certain point on the coast of Newfoundland; and there I shall dispose of your friends so effectually that you need entertain no hopes of ever beholding them again. A trip to the nearest American port will be next in order, where the services of a preacher will be secured to blend our loving hearts into a blissful unity. Then, bidding farewell to our friends, the 'Flying Fishermen,' we will immediately proceed by rail to the Modern Athens."

"Of course our quiet marriage should be followed by a more or less extensive tour, but, alas! that pleasure must be forgone, for matters of the most vital importance claim our immediate attention. It is quite essential that all possible dispatch be used to bring Luke Osmond to account for his wrong-doings; otherwise, with a continuation of his recent ill-luck, the old rascal may find time to drop the remainder of your inheritance into the maelstrom of speculation. It will be my duty, as your husband, to destroy all possibility of this calamity—a point concerning which I am very solicitous, I assure you."

"Then, after compelling your late guardian to disgorge his ill-gotten gains and ousting him from town in disgrace, nothing remains for us but to settle quietly down to a life of ease and pleasure, and, in the language of the conventional fairy-tale 'live happily ever afterward.'"

"Such is my cherished plan, dear Bertha—a plan which requires only your hearty approval and co-operation to insure a successful consummation. Now, what do you think of the prospect? Is it not delightful?"

"Perhaps it is when viewed from your standpoint; but I am free to assert that your bright anticipations will never be realized," quickly returned Bertha Deane, who had listened disdainfully to Captain Claude's glib utterance. "So, Mr. Adventurer, you had best dispossess yourself of those roseate visions of the future, and abandon all idea of fingering the fortune, to possess which is the real goal of your misguided ambition."

Seemingly endowed with renewed hope and courage, the captive heiress faced her persecutor boldly, while her voice rung loud and clear. Some influence seemed subtly at work, perhaps admonishing the poor girl that aid was nigh.

Her continued attitude of defiance both surprised and exasperated the rover chief. He had not calculated upon any such display of womanly spirit, but rather expected his helpless victim to eventually yield to despair and tearfully sue for mercy on her bended knees; but such a course seemed furthest from the heroine's mind.

"I infer from those words, my proud beauty, that you are still inexorable," said the schemer, illy concealing his impatience. "Can it be possible that you are blind to the rare pleasure of

the life I suggested? Let me remind you of the alternative which I hinted at during our first interview, and which has probably escaped your memory."

"Unless you submit to my arrangements without further perversity, a life of misery shall be yours. Exiled from home and friends, you shall share the fortunes of the 'Flying Fishermen,' a decided contrast to your accustomed life, as a brief experience will teach you. I am not to be entirely thwarted; and, if you will not be my wife, you shall become my mistress. Now, what think you of that prospect?"

Captain Claude advanced a step, his eyes glowing like living coals as they searched the pallid face of his intended victim.

"Come! No more delay!" he continued, roughly. "The future is in your own power to decide; so speak out, once for all!"

"Stand back!" cried Bertha Deane, with sudden energy. "Another step will be taken at your peril, for here is a trusty friend that will protect me from your insults. Begone! or I will sheathe this weapon in your worthless body."

The heiress had suddenly assumed an aggressive attitude, confronting her persecutor with upraised arm, revealing for the first time the fact that in her fair right hand was clasped a keen-edged dagger. The gleam of the blade in the sunlight was rivaled by the determined fire that burned in the brave girl's eyes.

Captain Claude discreetly paused, doubting not that the threat would be put into instant execution.

"So, then; this is the secret of your sudden show of courage!" he laughed, in high amusement. "Really, I admire your pluck in relying for protection upon a weapon which, in your gentle hands, is so utterly harmless that—"

With a sudden, tigerish bound he was upon the heroic girl, who, never faltering, struck out swiftly with a strength born of desperation. Quick though he was, Captain Claude could not wholly avoid that sweeping blow. The descending blade penetrated his outstretched arm, and wrung a sharp cry of pain from his lips. But in another moment he had seized the poor girl's wrist, and wrested the dirk from her feeble grasp.

Disarmed, disheartened, Bertha Deane shrunk from the angered rover, who now regarded her with fiercely flashing eyes.

"What a beautiful spitfire! Really, I had not anticipated such a dramatic exhibition on your part," he cried, sarcastically. "You struck swiftly, my dear, but your aim was poor; and as a result, I have your trusty weapon, which I am compelled to keep, as I see how dangerous it is to leave edge-tools in your nervous hands. I shall take good care that no more weapons find their way into your possession."

"Scoundrel! Would that the blade had reached your heart!" exclaimed the heiress, vehemently, at which Kingsley laughed long and loud.

"Mercy! What an uncharitable wish to find utterance by such sweet, innocent lips! I can scarcely believe my ears. Well, my lovely belligerent, with your kind permission I will now withdraw my presence, as I see you are in a passionate mood and disinclined to listen to reason. When I visit you again it will be with hopes that you have finally descended from your high horse, and awoke to a true sense of your folly in resisting my wishes. Until then, goodbye, my bride that is to be!"

As Captain Claude sauntered from the cabin, his mocking laughter rung in the ears of the hapless captive who threw herself upon her couch in a paroxysm of despair.

Was no help near? Was she never to escape the clutches of this remorseless fiend in human shape?

CHAPTER XXI.

SAVED FROM THE DEEP.

BRAVE Jack Lantern, clinging desperately to the rigging, heard the outlaw captain's ominous words, and saw that gleaming weapon leveled at his head. Then came the spiteful report of the piece, and, almost simultaneously, he felt a sharp, burning sensation near his temple, his grasp on the ratlines relaxed, he felt himself descending rapidly through space—then came unconsciousness!

As the young sailor toppled from his perch, the vessel lurched violently to one side, and to this providential, though quite natural occurrence he owed his escape from instant death on the deck below; for the sudden inversion of the mast served to throw him far out into the air, and he descended well clear of the schooner's side.

Instantly revived by immersion in the icy waters, Jack battled manfully for preservation. At first he was weak and bewildered, and scarcely comprehended his awful predicament, but his strength rapidly returned, and, being an accomplished swimmer, he had little difficulty in keeping afloat.

Tossed up and down like a cork upon the heaving billows, he looked in vain for the "Antelope" and "Flying Fish." Without doubt the vessels were not far away, yet the thick

blinding spray effectually hid their lights from view. However, it mattered not to Jack Lantern that the craft were within easy hail; the heartless foes who were responsible for his present position could scarcely be expected to lay to and pick him up, even were they aware he was still alive and in close proximity.

And so the schooners sped on their course, rapidly widening the distance between them and the heroic youth who, buffeted this way and that by the merciless waves, comprehended full well the horror of the situation. The flying spray choked and blinded him; the icy current chilled him to the bone. It was a position where natatorial prowess was of little avail, for the lad's body and limbs were fast growing benumbed, and death from sheer exposure seemed but the question of a few brief moments.

Jack Lantern fully realized his danger, and his stout heart sunk within him. Was he doomed to perish thus miserably in the youth and vigor of his existence? Was no help nigh in this hour of need?

Yes; aid was near! It appeared in a novel, but no less welcome guise. A long, dark object, like a gigantic log, loomed suddenly before the drowning sailor. In a moment it was within easy reach, and ten sinewy fingers gripped it tenaciously. By a desperate effort, Jack succeeded in dragging his bruised and benumbed body upon the floating timber, and clung there, breathless, trembling—hardly realizing that he was saved!

It was a huge spar that had drifted so providentially within reach of the fisher-boy—without doubt that portion of the "Antelope's" mainmast which had been shot away by the Flying Fishermen. Much of the rigging was still attached to the spar, and Jack easily secured rope enough to lash himself firmly thereto, being determined that no encroaching wave should sweep him from his new-found treasure.

Then he looked searchingly about for some sign of the schooners. Their toplights were still to be seen, though these had dwindled to mere sparks in the distance, and soon faded entirely from view. A strange sense of loneliness stole upon the castaway as the last sign of his beloved friends vanished in the gloom. Helpless in the power of a remorseless foe, they were being borne away to an unknown fate; while he who should have saved them was tossing upon the ocean's breast with but a single timber between him and a watery grave.

Yet, that timber was stanch and strong, and leaped buoyantly from crest to crest with its human load. While hardly as comfortable as a boat, Jack felt confident that his unique craft would answer its purpose admirably, and hope rose high at the prospect of speedy deliverance. Moreover, he found that a strong current was bearing the spar along, and that, too, in the same general direction taken by the schooner. So, being aware that Captain Claude was heading straight for the Newfoundland Coast, there were ample grounds for the belief that a few hours at the most would bring the castaway in sight of land.

In that event there was a good prospect of meeting the Flying Fishermen again. Jack's heart throbbed violently at the thought! Was there not still an opportunity to aid his friends?

Time alone could tell! With his busy brain teeming with conflicting thoughts, the sailor watched and waited for the light of day to reveal his whereabouts. So preoccupied was he that he forgot his own physical discomforts, even ignoring the painful wound on his forehead where Captain Claude's bullet had cut its way.

And so the hours dragged wearily by until at last darkness was no longer upon the sea. It was with heartfelt joy that Jack Lantern greeted the break of day; and that joyful feeling was greatly increased when he saw that his calculations were correct—saw, through the rising mist, the frowning rock-walls of Newfoundland.

Yes; there were the iron-bound shores of the "island colony," with its jagged reefs and stupendous cliffs, which, though several miles distant, uprose with clear distinctness against the morning sky. But, the vessels? Where were they? Jack eagerly scanned the sea in all directions, but the closest scrutiny failed to reveal a sail.

For this, however, he found a ready explanation. Of course the freebooter had outstripped him in their passage, and, as they were quite likely to deviate considerably from a straight course in order to more quickly arrive at their stronghold, there was nothing strange about their disappearance. Jack felt confident that his foes were at that moment not many miles away, either skirting the shore or else already landed, though in which direction he had no present means of determining.

His chief anxiety now was to reach *terra firma* in safety, a task which was fraught with no little difficulty, as he very quickly realized. The tide was near its high and flowing rapidly, bearing the broken mast and its occupant steadily nearer. There was no doubt that he would reach the shore, but would it be alive, or as a bruised and battered corpse?

The scene was wild and inhospitable. Great

frowning cliffs, shooting precipitately from the water's edge, presented their inaccessible sides as far as the eye could reach. Against this rocky wall the encroaching waves broke with a deafening, incessant roar, sending showers of spray high into the air. There was no sign of a beach, not a particle of sand; nothing but bare, jagged rocks, uprising grim and terrible.

To dash with fearful velocity upon this rugged shore, to be buffeted to and fro with sharp-faced cliffs before, and a resistless sea behind, meant almost certain destruction; and intrepid Jack Lantern, injured though he was to scenes of peril, could not view this new ordeal without apprehension.

There was no escape, however; he was completely at the mercy of the flowing tide, which every moment bore him nearer to the dreaded coast. Jack nerved himself for a desperate battle with the elements, for well he knew that life was to be preserved only by almost superhuman efforts. He unlashed the lines that secured him to the spar, still clinging thereto, but in readiness to part company with his unmanageable craft whenever the proper time arrived.

And now the mast, with its human freight, was fairly within the maelstrom of angry waters. Great, white-capped billows arose on every hand. Clouds of spray filled the air, blinding the bewildered castaway; the deep roar of the breakers rung in his ears, louder—louder—louder! Suddenly, through the flying mist, the dark face of a wave-washed cliff appeared, scarcely ten fathoms ahead. The ordeal was at hand, and the dauntless sailor steeled his nerves for a life-or-death encounter.

A monstrous wave caught up the spar, and dashed it with lightning-like velocity upon the frightful rocks that loomed up right ahead. Jack Lantern threw himself from the mast, just as he and it were hurled against the cliff together! Terribly bruised and half-stunned by the shock, the lad felt himself being drawn back again by the receding wave, and struggled feebly to secure a foothold. His bleeding hands encountered a sharp projection in the side of the cliff, to which he clung with a tenacious grip.

Scarcely had he time to draw a breath, when another mighty volume of water broke over him, and, receding, threatened to tear him from his hold.

He resisted the strain successfully, however, and then essayed to climb further up the cliff, beyond reach of the encroaching sea. In vain his desperate efforts! The smooth, slippery wall above presented no hold for hand or foot. The only projecting point within reach, was the friendly knob to which he now clung so madly.

Wave after wave dashed over the devoted youth in swift succession. The roar of the angry waters reverberated in his ears; a thousand ravenous demons seemed tugging at his back to tear him from his hold, and drag him back to death. The strain was terrible: human strength and endurance could not long withstand it! Faint, bruised, and bleeding, half-suffocated by the dense spray, and well-nigh unconscious, Jack Lantern felt the strength fast ebbing from his exhausted body, and realized that but a few brief moments separated him from destruction.

Yet those few brief moments proved all-sufficient to work the salvation of the perishing fisher-boy. As every dog is said to have its day, so has every tide its turning; and it chanced that this particularly aggressive sea reached its ebbing point just as the exhausted sailor felt that further resistance on his part was a physical impossibility.

In sudden joy he recognized the truth. The waves no longer broke over him with their accustomed fury; the tide had reached and passed its turning point. How the thought revived his failing strength, his drooping spirits.

Each succeeding sea failed to attain the height of its predecessor, until at last the clinging lad saw with unutterable delight that the water no longer reached his position. Slowly the sea receded, inch by inch, sullenly muttering its displeasure at the loss of its intended victim.

And so, by the opportune workings of Heaven's laws, Jack Lantern's life was preserved. The relaxation which succeeded the terrible struggle for life, however, was too much for the poor boy's overtaxed nerves.

"Saved!—saved!—saved!" he muttered deliriously, and fell in a huddled heap at the base of the cliff, where he lay still and unconscious at the very edge of the retrogressive waters, while the pitiless spray beat in icy showers upon his white upturned face.

CHAPTER XXII.

ON THE TRAIL.

SEVERAL hours elapsed ere Jack Lantern recovered consciousness, and even then so confused was he that no little further time was consumed in arriving at a proper comprehension of the situation. Endeavoring to arise, he found the task fraught with great difficulty; for so long a period of inactivity had stiffened his bruised and bleeding body to such an extent that the

slightest movement was attended by much pain and inconvenience.

But vigorous and prolonged rubbing at length induced his nether limbs to exercise their proper functions, and he then hobbled, slowly and painfully, from the spot that had proved so well-nigh fatal. What a deplorable sight he presented, poor fellow, as, weak, sore, wet and dispirited, he made his way laboriously along the rocky shore! It was well for Jack's personal pride that no tell-tale mirror was available to disclose to him his pale, blood-stained features, and general air of dilapidation.

Almost the first object that met his gaze was what remained of the mast that had gallantly borne him over leagues of water to this bleak and barren coast. From repeated beating against the rocks, this great stanch timber had been literally dashed to fragments; and Jack could but marvel at the mysterious powers of the divine Providence that had brought him, a creature of flesh and blood, safely through an ordeal before which this massive trunk of oak had speedily succumbed.

But the young sailor lost little time in moralizing. Simultaneously with the return of his senses had come the recollection that stern work was already cut out for him—work that demanded prompt and undivided attention. His friends were at that moment helpless prisoners in the hands of Captain Claude, who had declared his intention of taking them directly to his secret rendezvous. This latter place was at some secluded spot along the adjacent coast, and, Jack believed, not far distant from his present position. To find the stronghold of the "Flying Fishermen" was now of primary importance.

By the position of the sun, which was bravely struggling to make itself visible in the hazy atmosphere, he saw that it was nearly midday; and the thought of so much valuable time already lost caused him to fret with impatience. At that moment, however, Jack suddenly found himself in a quandary. In which direction should he proceed?

Of course he was utterly unable to determine whether the freebooters, in coasting the island, had sailed to the eastward or the westward. So, no matter which way he went, the chances were even that he would simply put more and more distance between himself and the objects of his search.

In this dilemma Jack Lantern stood for some time perplexed, impatient. Finally, unable to find a correct solution of the problem, he determined to "toss up" and shape his course by the result. He took a copper cent from his pocket and spun it high into the air.

"Heads, east; tails, west!" he exclaimed, then bent to learn the verdict from the mute arbiter at his feet. The "liberty head" met his earnest gaze.

"Heads it is; and I shall abide by the decision," muttered Jack; and without a moment's hesitation he set out to the eastward, first, however, securing his old cent, for it was a pocket-piece and, in fact, the only coin that the young seaman possessed. He had carried it for years, and, though professing to ignore all those various little superstitions for which mariners are noted, it cannot be denied that Jack would have greatly deplored the loss of his "luck-penny," as he chose to call it.

Yet, as he trudged along the shore, it was not without grave suspicions that perhaps his much-prized coin was for once at fault. This, however, time alone could determine; so the youth pressed resolutely forward as fast as circumstances would allow.

The shore of Newfoundland is notoriously irregular, abounding with deep bays, which in turn are skirted by countless coves and inlets, all of which must needs be followed in detail by the unlucky traveler who is doomed to this unenviable mode of locomotion. Then, too, the way abounds with jagged reefs and monstrous boulders, while the sandy beach so familiar to coast-dwellers is noticeable chiefly for its absence. Taking into consideration these disadvantages, together with his own physical condition, it will be seen that Jack Lantern's progress was necessarily slow and unsatisfactory.

He found himself skirting the indented shore of an extensive bay, whose furthest extremity was a frowning headland, toward which he had long cast longing eyes, believing that from this point an excellent view of the coast beyond might be obtained. To reach the objective point required fully two hours of unceasing travel, but what Jack saw from this new lookout amply repaid him for his trouble.

Beyond this headland the general coast-line was nearly straight for several miles, or until another point obstructed further view; and it was slightly beyond this second promontory, a few points seaward, that the sailor saw a sight that filled him with surprise and delight.

Two vessels were standing directly inshore, on a tack that would just bring them clear of the point into the invisible waters beyond. Jack instantly recognized the craft as those for which he was searching—the "Flying Fish" and "Antelope." There was no mistaking them, even at that great distance; for the absence of the hindmost schooner's mainmast was in itself sufficient proof of her identity.

So, Jack was on the right track after all; his lucky penny had not betrayed him. He eagerly watched the distant schooners, which soon disappeared from view behind the jutting headland. From their movements he judged that the "Flying Fishermen" were about to drop anchor in the bay which, he was confident, lay just beyond the point.

The eager fisher-boy lost no time in continuing his way, elated beyond measure at his new discovery. At the same time he was at a loss to account for the late arrival of the vessels along-shore, for they had left him far astern in the night, and naturally should have reached their present position many hours before. However, he did not bother much over a solution to this question. It sufficed to know that his enemies were almost within reach; and his heart beat high with hope as he toiled patiently along the rocky shore.

The headland was fully a league distant, but Jack plodded along so diligently that the distance was covered in a remarkably short time. As he neared the coveted point, eagerness gave way to sudden caution, and it was with the utmost care that he crept around the rocky cape and beheld—well, scarcely what he had anticipated.

There, sure enough, was a land-locked bay, just as his fertile fancy had depicted—deep, spacious, cliff-encompassed; but lo! the vessels he expected to behold at anchor there were nowhere to be seen!

Jack Lantern stared in blank amazement, scarcely able to credit his senses. He rubbed his eyes as if to assure himself that he was not asleep and dreaming. No! The schooners which he had seen with his own eyes, entering this identical bay scarcely an hour ago, had vanished completely, as if by some enchantment.

Forgetting all caution in his sudden bewilderment, Jack ran boldly out from his hiding place, climbing to a position that commanded a more extensive view of the land-locked harbor, but no amount of scrutiny brought to light the objects of his search.

This bay, he observed, was of peculiar formation, even for this coast, famous for its wonderful waterways. It was of horseshoe shape, and, save for the entrance, which was just wide enough to admit a good-sized craft, was completely surrounded by a precipitous wall of rock. This wall was remarkable for the fact that it appeared to be wholly without a break, rising smooth and fissureless to a considerable height, for all the world like the sides of a gigantic tub. All this Jack Lantern noted as he searched in vain for some obscure cove or inlet which might, he thought, conceal the missing craft.

Fully satisfied that this novel harbor contained no vessels of any description, yet totally mystified by the inexplicable disappearance of the "Flying Fishermen," Jack threw himself upon the ground in unutterable disgust, and sought to arrive at a plausible solution of the mystery.

He felt sure that the schooners had actually entered this bay; and yet, might he not be mistaken? Perhaps, after all, they had passed by this point, and were even now skirting the coast beyond. Jack looked eagerly in that direction, only to find that the opposite cliff completely shut off the view. He was determined, however, to settle the question immediately, and to do this there was but one way.

Already drenched to the skin, another cold bath mattered little to the impatient sailor; in a moment he plunged into the water and swam rapidly across the narrow channel that formed the entrance to the bay. Climbing nimbly up the rugged cliff, he reached its utmost height and anxiously scanned the extensive scene that presented itself to view.

Again, disappointment! A boundless prospect was before him, but the vessels he hoped to see were not numbered among its attractions. Utterly bewildered, Jack again sat down to consider the situation.

The vessels had *not* gone beyond that point, he reasoned, or they would now be in sight, for the fastest sailer afloat could not pass from the range of vision in so short a time. On the other hand, the schooners were *not* within the bay. Where, then, were they? It was a question that Jack Lantern vainly racked his brain to answer; the more he pondered, the greater was his perplexity.

Indeed, he half believed that he had not seen the vessels at all—that the supposed spectacle of the two schooners standing inshore was but the phantasmagorical production of a fevered brain.

Perhaps the bewildered lad would have actually accepted this view of the question and left the spot in disgust, had not a discovery been made that lent to the situation an entirely new aspect.

As, quite absorbed in thought, he gazed vacantly across tranquil bay with eyes fixed upon the opposite wall, it was to suddenly become aware that *the face of the cliff was moving!*

CHAPTER XXIII.

SOLVING THE MYSTERY.

JACK LANTERN sat like a figure of stone, spell-bound at this astounding discovery. Surely,

he was mistaken! His excited vision had deceived him! But, no; even as he gazed the phenomenon was repeated. The surface of the steep gray wall moved with a gentle, vacillating motion that to the keen-eyed observer was plainly perceptible.

Here was mystery upon mystery! What magic was this by which yon towering cliff stirred from its adamant foundation? Surely, the amazed young sailor might well be pardoned if he believed himself to be the victim of some subtle enchantment.

But suddenly Jack bounded to his feet; for a bright idea had come to him, bursting like a gleam of sunshine upon his perplexed mind.

"What a superstitious fool I was!" he muttered. "Rocks and cliffs are not endowed with life, even in this remarkable country. Yet, it is equally certain that my eyes have not deceived me. Now for the solution to this mystery! Is it not possible that what I have seen to move is really not the cliff at all, but—"

But what? That was what Jack Lantern resolved to ascertain without delay. He made his way eagerly along the edge of the towering wall that encompassed the miniature bay. The way was rough and perilous, necessitating very slow progress; but the youth persevered, and soon arrived at a spot nearly opposite his starting-point.

A few steps nearer, and Jack paused abruptly, astonished beyond measure at what he saw! Though shrewdly suspecting something of the truth, he was scarcely prepared for so sudden a revelation of the mystery.

Standing at the entrance to the bay and scrutinizing the towering wall of cliffs, apparently without a fissure, by which it was encompassed, few, indeed, would for an instant suspect that this mysterious sheet of water had its outlet as well as inlet. It remained for shrewd Jack Lantern to discover that a second opening existed in that rugged coast-wall.

He saw that a narrow channel extended inland, between two lofty frowning walls. For several hundred yards its course was remarkably, straight and regular; then the canyon trended abruptly to the left, shutting out all view of the stream beyond.

Whether this new-found water-way was a small river seeking its outlet through the narrow defile, or merely a singularly elongated arm of the bay itself, Jack did not pause to consider. Enough to know that the hitherto secret passage lay before him, pointing the way, he believed, to the stronghold of the "Flying Fishermen."

Yet, why had the existence of this new topographical feature remained so long unrevealed? It took the sharp-eyed explorer but a moment, now, to find an answer to that interesting question.

Closely examining the entrance to the passage, he discovered the cause of his former perplexity. What he saw was the work of human hands, and as ingenious as it was surprising.

A stout timber extended across the top of the opening, resting upon the edge of the opposite cliffs, to which it was firmly secured. From this beam was suspended a huge piece of canvas, made up of several strips neatly sewed together. This enormous curtain fell to the water's edge, and was stretched taut at either side, being ingeniously fastened to the wall in such a manner that it could readily be released and drawn aside, if need be, to allow the passage of a boat.

The canvas thus so shrewdly brought into requisition, was old and of a dirty gray color that corresponded well with the somber face of the cliff; and, being so cunningly arranged, was well calculated to serve its purpose admirably. Viewed at a short distance, the coast-wall presented a continuous, unbroken appearance, and it would indeed require sharp eyesight to detect the shrewd deception.

Even Jack Lantern, with every faculty on the alert, would have fallen an easy victim to this cunning trick but for a fortunate incident. The brisk breeze that chanced to be stirring, slightly agitated the curtain; and, as Jack's eyes were resting on that spot, he saw the movement of the supposed cliff, and marveled greatly thereat.

In this case, surprise and wonder led to investigation, and the latter resulted in discovery; so that now the persevering sailor possessed the key to the mystery that had so long perplexed his brain.

Jack had no doubt now that he was on the right track. Who but the "Flying Fishermen" could have devised this ingenious contrivance to conceal the entrance to the channel? None but men of crime and violence, fugitives from law and justice, would be likely to take such infinite pains to cover their tracks, especially in a region so wild and little frequented. The passage was certainly wide enough to admit a schooner, and the water sufficiently deep to float vessels of so light draft as the "Antelope" or "Flying Fish." It was, therefore, quite possible that the freebooters had disappeared in that direction and by way of the secret channel.

The fisher-boy lost no time in idleness. There lay the route to the outlaws' stronghold, and he would follow the trail to its ending, be the result as it might! With this determination, he made his way along the cliff, moving from point to

point with extreme caution, for he felt he was treading on perilous ground, and might at any moment be discovered by one of Captain Claude's emissaries.

His fears on that score were groundless, however; for the freebooter chief felt too much confidence in the efficiency of his canvas curtain to detail men to watch for intruders who, he fondly imagined, would never come from that direction. Yet, it was well that Jack exercised due caution, for, as he rounded the bend in the stream before mentioned, it was to find the objects of his search in plain sight.

There lay the schooner with all sails furled, looking cramped and uncomfortable in their narrow quarters, their sides almost grazing the beetling cliffs that loomed up on either hand. The hindmost vessel was but a few hundred yards from the spot where Jack Lantern crouched, trembling with excitement. From his elevated position he could overlook all that transpired in the channel below.

The freebooters had taken to their boats, and were towing the vessels ahead, this being the only means of working them through the narrow passage. It was an extremely arduous task, and progress was necessarily slow—so slow, in fact, as to exasperate the impatient trailer on the heights above, who found further advance on his part at present entirely out of the question. Enconced in a convenient nook, he waited until the shouts of the crew, tugging lustily at their oars, were no longer audible to his ears; then he crept forward, to find them out of sight. Again the young sailor moved cautiously ahead, and ere long overhauled the objects of his espionage. In this manner keeping the freebooters almost constantly in sight, he continued his monotonous course, vaguely wondering when and where it would end.

The frowning walls that bordered the stream now decreased in height, and finally gave way to shelving banks covered with dense undergrowth. The river, too, widened perceptibly, and at a point nearly a mile from its mouth spread itself into a miniature lake or basin, several acres in extent. Above this place the stream was still narrower than before.

The shades of night were fast falling when the Flying Fishermen finally arrived at this sequestered spot; and, judging by their subsequent movements, it was the terminus of the wearisome journey. The boats' crews returned to the vessels, and the latter lay at anchor on the peaceful lake.

In the mean time Jack Lantern hung persistently to the trail, though progress was seriously impeded by the intricate thicket that grew to the very water's edge. He reached the shore of the basins and looked with eagerness upon the picturesque scene, the features of which were now but dimly discernible in the deepening twilight.

The stronghold of the Flying Fishermen was before him. He had accomplished his desire, and tracked the sea-tigers to their lair; yet, he asked himself, what benefit would accrue from his present position? Yonder were the outlaws, and there, too, were his friends in close captivity; and in their defense he could oppose but his own feeble strength against two-score well-armed foes!

Was ever man confronted by such a discouraging prospect?

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE HIDDEN RETREAT.

It may be well at this point to explain why the Flying Fishermen, who were heading coastward at the time when they parted company with Jack Lantern so unceremoniously, and who then forged so rapidly ahead of the drifting sailor, should arrive at the island several hours after the latter accomplished a landing. So apparent an inconsistency requires a few words of elucidation.

When Captain Claude went on deck after his interesting interview with his refractory captive, it was to make a discovery that caused him no little uneasiness. What seemed to be a light fragment of cloud was curling slowly skyward just above the horizon, and but a few points off the bow; but the rover knew at a glance that the object that had challenged his attention was not a cloud—but smoke!

Smoke!—and the vessel that produced it, at present invisible below the horizon, lay directly between them and the looked-for land. Captain Claude was aware that no steam vessels frequented these waters, save for an occasional Government cruiser, and such he doubted not was the nature of the craft whose ascending smoke heralded her appearance. Bold as he was, the captain had no desire to encounter a Government boat with the crippled Antelope in tow; investigations would inevitably ensue that would bring about a disastrous ending to his career. So, happily warned in time of the threatening danger, he at once ordered the schooners hove to to await the disappearance of the supposed cruiser.

The latter vessel was moving at a snail's pace, and several hours elapsed ere her tell-tale smoke became no longer visible, and Captain Claude ventured to resume his interrupted course. Soon afterward the frowning shores of New-

foundland were sighted, but it was past midday when, after skirting the coast for several miles, the freebooters put boldly into the land-locked bay that marked the entrance to their stronghold.

Little imagined they, however, that a sharp-eyed youth was watching from behind a distant peak, noting their appearance with peculiar satisfaction. For thus it is upon the veriest trifles that our destinies hinge! But for the opportune appearance of the cruiser upon the scene, causing several hours delay in the movements of the cautious marauders, the latter would of course have arrived alongshore much sooner, in fact long before the fatigued fisher-boy recovered consciousness. As a natural consequence the latter, seeing nothing of the vessels, would have continued in his blind search, passing the concealed entrance to the channel without the slightest suspicion of the truth. Thanks to the enforced tardiness of his foes, however, Jack caught sight of them as they stood inshore, and, in endeavoring to fathom the mystery of their sudden disappearance, made the lucky discovery that enabled him to go straight to the secret rendezvous of the "Flying Fishermen."

As may well be imagined, Captain Claude was blissfully unconscious of the fact that his secret passage had been so readily penetrated—that an indomitable sleuth was at that moment on his trail, tracking him with all the skill and cunning of an Indian scout. Nor would his incredulity have diminished had he been told that the spy was no other than the young seaman whom he fondly believed to be at the bottom of the ocean, a victim of his own unerring marksmanship!

Thus ignorant of the truth, the rover captain reached his retreat, an isolated spot far from the haunts of mankind, where he felt perfectly secure from molestation.

A wilder and more secluded region could scarcely be imagined, and the existence of this pretty pond, with its long, deep outlet to the sea, was probably unknown to any outside the outlaw brotherhood; for the spot was remote from any settlement, and even the native islanders appeared in that vicinity but rarely. By merest chance Captain Claude had himself discovered the inland passage, and, finding it navigable for vessels of moderate draught, had immediately hit upon the plan of converting the place into a secret rendezvous for his band.

And surely he could find no other spot so admirably adapted for the purpose. Who would think of finding men and vessels in that out-of-the-way region, encompassed by the virgin forest, and fully a mile from the open main? To guard against intruders, Captain Claude's ingenious mind evolved the curtain or screen of canvas, as heretofore described, to conceal the mouth of the channel from inquisitive eyes; and in the efficiency of that novel contrivance he placed implicit confidence.

Not content with this precaution, still further steps were taken to divert suspicion. The cabins erected for the use of the freebooters when on shore were plentifully stocked with hooks, lines, nets and other fishing appliances, while upon the pebbly shore were constructed a number of flakes, or elevated platforms, upon which fish are usually spread to dry. All this was done to mislead whosoever might, by some chance, stumble upon the rendezvous, and impress them with the idea that what they saw was the resort of a party of honest fishermen who repaired thither to dry and cure their fares.

All in all, the stronghold of the "Flying Fishermen" was a most advantageous one, even though difficult of access; and Captain Claude might well imagine himself secure from the prying eyes of the outside world.

But as he lounged carelessly on deck, rejoicing in fancied immunity from care and danger, there skulked Indian-like upon the adjacent shore a youth whose unsuspected presence argued no good to the outlaw band.

From the leafy covert Jack Lantern continued to watch the dimly-outlined vessels as they lay quietly at anchor but a few hundred feet away. Night was now at hand, and its friendly shelter promised to be of great service to the youth in his perilous enterprise. Whatever he proposed to do in behalf of the imprisoned fishermen must be attempted before daybreak in order to be attended by any chance of success. Realizing this, yet wholly unable to hit upon a feasible plan of action, Jack sat by the water's edge almost disheartened at the enormity of his self-allotted task.

Suddenly the stillness was broken by sounds of renewed activity aboard the schooners; and presently the sharp-eyed watcher could discern the dark shapes of several boats as they put off for the shore. The freebooters were about to land; and no sooner did Jack comprehend their design than he made his way stealthily along the bank toward the spot where he judged the party would disembark.

As the boats reached the shore, and the occupants sprung eagerly out upon the strand, the bold spy was already there to witness their subsequent maneuvers, though the fact was little suspected by the enemy. Lurking in the

shadows, himself secure from observation, he closely scrutinized the new-comers as they filed past scarcely an arm's length from his hiding-place. Captain Claude's familiar figure led the van, and, judging from their numbers, nearly if not quite his entire force accompanied him.

The party passed quickly from view, their destination being doubtless the cabins that stood a short distance from the shore; and to that point Jack Lantern instantly determined to follow, for by spying upon the movements of the outlaws he hoped to obtain an inkling of their plans.

The cabins, two in number, were built at the hight of a shelving bank overlooking the water, and surrounded on three sides by dense undergrowth, a portion of which had been cleared away to secure a suitable site for the structures.

As Jack reached the edge of the clearing, lights flashed from the nearer cabin and rough voices sounded from within. Curious to learn what was transpiring, he crept softly under the wall and peered through one of the low and narrow windows. He saw that the hut consisted of one roomy, scantily-furnished apartment, which was at that moment filled by the ruffianly gang self-styled the "Flying Fishermen." Captain Claude was about to address his men, who gathered around in a state of eager expectancy.

"My lads, we are once more at home, after a most successful cruise. The capture of yonder fishing-vessel marks the greatest victory in the history of this band; and therefore it behooves us to celebrate the event in as fitting a manner as circumstances will allow. So for the remainder of the night, lads, consider yourselves off duty, and enjoy yourselves as best you can, though I caution you to keep in condition to report for duty to-morrow, as in all probability our stay here will be extremely short."

This brief speech was received with hearty applause, for it was but seldom that the crew of the "Flying Fish" were permitted to "make a night of it" on shore, and the opportunity was duly appreciated.

The listener without easily caught the words of the outlaw leader, and saw the latter turn as if to depart from the cabin. He quickly darted back into the bushes, just in time to evade discovery.

Captain Claude emerged from the hut, followed closely by a sturdy freebooter in whom Jack recognized the first officer of the black schooner. The two ruffians made their way to the second habitation, this apparently being the private quarters of the leader while ashore.

Scarcely had they entered when the crafty spy stole from his covert and took up a new position close to the door of the shanty which had been left partially open. He hoped to overhear something of interest, now, and in this was not disappointed. The words of the men inside were perfectly audible to his eager ears.

"You have heard what I said to the crew just now," Captain Claude was saying. "I want you to keep a sharp eye on the lads. Let them enjoy themselves to a reasonable extent, but see that they don't hit the grog too hard, for we must weigh anchor again at noon to-morrow."

"So soon, captain?" in evident surprise.

"Yes. Important business requires my immediate departure for the American Coast. I shall, however, divide my force, taking only enough men with me to equip the schooner, and leaving you here in charge of the stronghold with the remainder."

"And the prisoners?"

"Transfer the girl to the cabin of the 'Flying Fish,' for of course she accompanies me. As for the others, I reckon their present position is good enough for them. Give the poor devils enough to eat, but see that they do not get above the hatches, for they are tough customers to handle and will make trouble at the slightest opportunity. When I return we will decide upon their final disposition."

"You may rest assured, captain, I will keep the prisoners under subjection," declared the subaltern, confidently. "Are there any further instructions, sir?"

"Nothing more. Yet, stay! You can safely leave the crew for an hour or more, and, as I'm so deuced nervous I scarcely know how to pass the time, suppose you remain and share a bottle of something choice which I have at hand. And by the way, lieutenant, that's an elegant ring you wear. I have long admired and coveted it. What d'ye say to staking it against an equivalent in cash, and settle the future ownership of both by a quiet game of draw?"

The first officer readily acquiesced to this proposition, having a decided taste for good liquor together with overweening confidence in his own poker-playing ability.

Jack Lantern, however, waited to hear no more. Leaving Captain Claude and his subordinate to enjoy their wine and cards, he noiselessly retreated from the dangerous spot. He had seen and heard quite enough to convince him that his presence was not suspected, but, on the contrary, all hands were preparing to pass a night of unalloyed enjoyment, wholly undisturbed by thoughts of danger. Even the chief

had relaxed his usual vigilance, scouting the idea of an enemy penetrating his sequestered hiding-place.

What an opportunity now presented itself to the brave young sailor, at the very time when his despair was deepest, an opportunity of which he was not slow to avail himself. Thanks to the misplaced confidence of the outlaws, to rescue the imprisoned seamen was now quite within the bounds of possibility.

Jack's heart beat fast, and he could hardly suppress his eagerness as he crept stealthily down to the shore. He paused but a moment there; then waded cautiously out into the lake until beyond his depth, and struck out for the craft that bore his captive friends.

CHAPTER XXV.

JACK TO THE RESCUE.

JACK LANTERN'S purpose was to board the "Antelope," and to do this required no little skill and caution, for it was possible that one or more of the rovers still remained to guard the prisoners. That he might more easily elude the vigilance of these sentinels, if such were actually aboard, Jack chose to swim to the vessel rather than risk discovery in one of the boats that were drawn up on the shore.

He swam with powerful but noiseless strokes, and soon drew near to the "Antelope" which lay considerably closer inshore than did her piratical consort. There was no sign of life upon her deck as she swung at anchor upon the placid surface of the lake, and this fact increased the swimmer's confidence.

Coming up astern he climbed noiselessly over the side, and as his feet once more pressed that familiar deck he felt a thrill of unutterable pleasure. Catlike, he crept from point to point, keenly eying every suspicious object, fearful lest it might assume the form of a lurking foe.

But after making a thorough investigation, Jack reached the conclusion that he was indeed alone upon the schooner's deck. All his recent precautions, it seemed were quite unnecessary. In view of the fact that Captain Kedge and his men were each and every one tied hand and foot like so many trussed turkeys, the rover-chief might well believe them safe enough without leaving a guard. He had simply taken the extra precaution of battening down the hatches.

As Jack comprehended this he could hardly credit his good fortune. After many reverses luck now seemed to be playing directly into his hands. He removed the hatches with some difficulty, then made his way below.

As the lad descended into the dismal hold, he stumbled over a prostrate form and, losing his equilibrium, fell heavily atop the unknown, wringing a cry of remonstrance from that unfortunate.

"Dod-rot yer dod-rotted skin, ye p'izen imp of ugliness!" roared a wrathful voice. "Ha'n't ye got more respect for a man than to walk on him when he's down? Jest cut loose my foot-gear for a minnit, durn ye, an' I'll guarantee to kick smithereens outen yer lubberly carcass."

The youth for whom this stream of invective was intended uttered a joyful cry, for he recognized the familiar voice of old Tom Kedge.

"I beg your pardon, captain," he cried, in mock politeness, "though I really believe you are alone to blame for this awkward collision. You should provide a lamp or two for the guidance of your visitors when they are so kind as to venture into these sumptuous quarters."

Had a solid shot from Captain Claude's terrible bow-chaser suddenly crashed through the side of the vessel, dealing destruction right and left, these imprisoned seamen could have been scarcely more dumfounded than they were to hear the familiar voice of Jack Lantern, as he stood in their very midst.

"Great hornspoon an' little fishes!" yelled Captain Kedge, who was the first to recover. "It's my lad, Jack, sure's I'm a sinner. Hooray—hooray!"

"Hush, captain!" Jack commanded, imperatively. "This is no time for unnecessary noise. Unless you are cautious, all may yet be lost."

"Sure enough, lad! In my delight at seein' you, I entirely overlooked the existence of them durned skunks above."

"But they are not above. Not one of the outlaw band is now aboard this craft. We are now within the secret stronghold of the 'Flying Fishermen,' you know, and all hands have gone ashore to celebrate their victory by an all-night jamboree."

"The deuce you say! But, Jack, there's more explanations due from you. We had gi'n ye up for dead, sure enuff; how happens it you're here, as chipper as a cricket. Come, lad, spin us the yarn."

The rescuer had already set the skipper at liberty and was performing similar service for the others. As he worked he regaled his hearers with a concise account of his stirring adventures. The task of liberation was soon completed, and the overjoyed fishermen gathered eagerly round their gallant deliverer.

"Now, my friends, we are all free once more, willing and capable to cope with our redoubtable foemen. It is within our power to wipe the 'Flying Fishermen' out of existence before

another sunrise; but, to guard against possible defeat, we must first devise a suitable plan of action, then strike swiftly and surely."

"Ay, lad; 'twill take a power of maneuverin' to sarcumvent the rascals, drunk though they undoubtedly be, for they still outnumber us nearly two to one. Howsumdever, I vote we adjourn to the deck to arrange our plans, for, durn me, if this place a'n't wuss'n the steerage of an emigrant ship. What, with bilge-water an' stinkin' codfish, I reckon I'll never get the smell outen my clo'es."

This motion was unanimously carried, for none among them were anxious to tarry in that malodorous place longer than was positively necessary. All hands repaired to the forecabin to form a council of war.

All—save one! Earle Fairfax failed to accompany his friends, the fishermen, further than the main-deck. Other thoughts were uppermost in his mind, and so he left the others to frame their aggressive campaign without his assistance, while he himself hastened to the cabin.

He found the door firmly fastened from the outside, for Captain Claude had taken the precaution to make his fair captive's prison doubly secure before leaving her alone upon the schooner.

The journalist rapped impatiently.

"Bertha!—Bertha! It is I—Earle!" he cried; and a glad cry answered him.

The ardent youth made short work of the fastenings, and, bursting into the room, clasped the overjoyed girl in his loving arms.

Meanwhile the fishermen were clustered in the forecabin, earnestly discussing the situation, and so preoccupied were they that Fairfax's absence passed unnoticed.

Suddenly the sound of dipping oars reached their startled ears. Somebody was approaching the schooner; and as there was no one in the vicinity save the freebooters, our friends found themselves confronted by the unwelcome prospect of meeting their formidable antagonists much sooner than they anticipated.

However, when Jack Lantern stole to the rail and peered cautiously over the water, he saw that the approaching boat contained but a single occupant, who was steering straight for the Antelope and coming on rapidly. Jack quickly crept back to report his discovery.

"There's only one of them, sure; and, if I'm not vastly mistaken, it's no other than the king-pin of the gang—Captain Claude, himself!"

"Lay low, lads, just where you are," commanded Captain Kedge, struggling to suppress his own excitement. "Lay low till the or'nary pirat comes aboard, an' then we'll nab him sure as c-o-d spells fish."

The lone boatman drew rapidly nearer. He ran under the stern, secured his craft by a painter, and clambered unhesitatingly to the deck.

Sure enough, it was the outlaw leader. His face was flushed with wine, and wore a look that was fairly demoniacal. On his finger might have been seen the same ring that, one brief hour since, was the valued property of his lieutenant.

Captain Claude strode upon the deck with his usual haughty air, and to all appearances was utterly unconscious of the change that had taken place on board during his short absence. He walked straight to the companionway and disappeared below.

"All the better for us, old feller. We're sure o' trappin' ye down there," chuckled Captain Kedge, grimly. Then, to his crew: "Foller me lively, lads; but not a sound for your lives!"

Like so many grim specters the eager men of the Antelope stole aft, elated at the idea of capturing the dreaded outlaw leader. As they reached the companionway, however, a startling scene presented itself to view.

When Captain Claude descended to the cabin, it was to receive his first intimation of danger. He saw that the door which he had so carefully secured was now opened wide, and, as he paused amazed, it was to hear faint voices emanating from the apartment. The rover stood in bewilderment, but only for one brief moment; the next he had drawn his ever ready pistol, and was stealing catlike toward the cabin door.

A glance within revealed the lovely object of his adoration clasped in the arms of the journalist whom he had fondly believed to be a helpless prisoner. The orbs of the adventurer blazed with fury at the sight, and with a hand that never faltered he drew a bead on the head of the unsuspecting youth.

It was at this critical moment that the fishermen came upon the scene. Old Tom Kedge, who was in advance, took in the situation at a glance, and his ready hand caught up a marine-spike. He hurled the missile with terrific force just as the outlaw's finger pressed the trigger.

"Whizz!" flew the marine-spike—"Bang!" went the revolver; but the former was the quicker and reached its mark barely in time to save the life of Earle Fairfax. Captain Claude received the missile upon his wrist, and instantly dropped the pistol even as it exploded; this movement caused the bullet to sink harmlessly into the floor, and the journalist, turning at that moment, realized his narrow escape from death.

Like a wounded tiger in his terrible strength and anger, the entrapped freebooter dashed into

the very midst of his foes with a fury that for a time threatened to assure his escape; but the dauntless fishermen assailed him from every side and finally overpowered him by sheer force.

Then, when Captain Claude found himself stretched upon the floor, surrounded by an exultant group, and bound hand and foot by rope enough to secure a dozen ordinary men, it was to realize how swiftly his vaunted triumph was metamorphosed into a most crushing defeat.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TURNING THE TABLES.

It was an excited party that assembled on the "Antelope's" deck immediately after the fortunate capture of Captain Claude, jubilant at the latter's downfall, yet alarmed lest the report of his revolver had reached the ears of his men on shore. Anxious glances were cast in that direction; but when several minutes had elapsed without producing any hostile demonstration from the carousing outlaws, it was concluded that the latter had failed to heed the brief disturbance.

Snatches of ribald song, oaths, jests and boisterous laughter floated over the water, wafted to their ears by the evening breeze, proclaiming that the ruffians were deeply engaged in "making a night of it," blissfully ignorant of their leader's fate.

It was with extreme satisfaction that the fishermen noted the apparent inattention of their foes; and every man was eager to continue the work so auspiciously begun. But Captain Kedge, while scarcely less impatient than his followers, foresaw the necessity of moving with the utmost caution.

"The rascals greatly outnumber us, ye see; an' they're probably jest drunk enuff to fight like Satan at a minute's warnin'. It behooves us, therefore, to surround the hut, an' bu'st in upon 'em afore they kin pull a weapon."

"As for that, captain, I believe that few if any of the gang are armed," exclaimed Jack Lantern. "I had an excellent view of the interior of the shanty, and failed to observe a single firearm or cutlass."

"All the better for us, then. If the varmints hev b'en so kind as to leave their weapons behind, it only remains for us to take possession of the same. Then we shall be more'n a match for 'em, durn their 'tarnal hides."

Preparations were instantly made to visit the black schooner and secure a portion of the arms which had undoubtedly been left by the "Flying Fishermen." For this purpose the boat was utilized in which Captain Claude had recently come aboard; and several men with Jack Lantern in command put off for the pirate craft. They found her wholly deserted, and soon returned to the "Antelope" with a quantity of cutlasses, at sight of which the skipper's weather-beaten visage brightened perceptibly.

"Oh, won't we give the durn skunks pertick'ler blue blazes!" he ejaculated. "Take a cutlass apiece, lads, an' prepare to swim ashore; for there's only one boat, an' I reckon there's no time to waste in sendin' for them that's drawn up on the bank yonder."

"One of us," he continued, "had oughter remain here to keep the gal company, an' also look after that cantankerous galoot who calls himself Captain Claude. He's sich a cute chap that I'm afeard he might find a way to wiggle outen his bonds and make tracks for the woods, unless some 'un stands with a pistol p'inted at his head. Mr. Fairfax, I reckon as how you would make a first-rate hand for that sort o' duty."

"Thank you, captain, for allotting me such soft duty," returned the journalist, with a smile. "I scarcely apprehend much trouble with the prisoner, for judging from his present appearance he would experience great difficulty in moving a finger, to say nothing of effecting his escape."

Captain Kedge delayed no longer, but now ordered his impatient crew ashore. They swung noiselessly over the schooner's side, and swam to the opposite bank. Here they paused to wring their dripping garments; while Jack and the skipper, in hurried whispers, arranged the details of the coming assault. The sailor-boy had an idea by which he hoped to heighten the surprise of the freebooters and thereby render their capture an easy matter.

A few moments later the word was given to advance, and, with weapons tightly grasped, the avenging band crept cat-like up the grassy slope toward the hut that shielded their hated foes.

Increased sounds of mirth and revelry assailed their ears, telling that the carousing ruffians were still unmindful of danger.

Like so many grim shadows the resolute tars assumed their positions close to the cabin wall, and then—

Jack Lantern strode boldly to the door and threw it open wide, standing fully revealed to the occupants of the room. The effect of his sudden appearance was even more than had been anticipated.

Sailors are notoriously superstitious, even when perfectly sane and sober; and this particular gang was scarcely in condition to withstand such a shock to their sensitive nerves as was now presented. When they saw at the

threshold, pale-faced, wild-eyed and dripping with water, the youth who had fallen from the foretop of the "Antelope" into the wild Atlantic, they firmly believed it was no flesh and blood that confronted them, but the ghost of their unfortunate victim.

Horror-stricken, they glared at the supposed apparition; then turned and would have fled precipitately had not the walls of the shanty effectually barred all progress.

It was at this moment, when the maudlin ruffians were cowering in abject fright, that Jack Lantern gave the preconcerted signal that brought his friends upon the scene. In rushed the avenging fishermen, with Captain Kedge in the van, their cutlasses gleaming wickedly as they circled in the air.

"Surrender!" roared the excited skipper. "Strike yer flag lively, durn ye, or we'll chop every mother's son o' ye into mince-meat."

This furious onslaught served to complete the bewilderment of the "Flying Fishermen," and they were able to offer but feeble resistance to Captain Kedge and his valiant men. The encounter speedily ended with every outlaw a helpless prisoner; while cheer after cheer went up from the victors until the very woods resounded with their pæans of triumph.

A strong force was left on shore to guard the captives, while the remainder of the fishermen returned to their vessel to enjoy a few hours of much needed repose. When morning dawned—their first and last in the secret stronghold—Captain Kedge made immediate preparations for leaving. It was his purpose to proceed at once to Halifax, and lay his case before the American consul at that port, hoping by this means to insure prompt and effective punishment to the "Flying Fishermen" for their manifold deeds of outlawry and crime.

The prisoners were taken on board the "Antelope" and consigned to the same quarters but recently occupied by their present conquerors. Captain Claude was forced to accompany his satellites to the loathsome hold, and, though the stoical scoundrel gave no sign, his feelings must have been far from tranquil as he contrasted his present unenviable condition with the magnificent future which his misguided fancy had depicted.

Meanwhile, Bertha Deane found more agreeable quarters in the spacious cabin of the black schooner. Once more surrounded by friends, and with her terrible foe bereft of his power, the fair girl's emotions were far more pleasurable than when she first visited the same apartment on the night of her abduction from the "Cephalonia."

All hands now set about the laborious task of towing the vessels down the narrow channel to the bay. Owing to their unfamiliarity with the place, this work consumed several hours, and it was high noon when the party reached the open main.

Then the "Antelope" was taken in tow, and away dashed the schooner before a favoring breeze, leaving the bleak shore of Newfoundland rapidly behind, while all on board rejoiced at the rare good fortune that enabled them to turn the tables so completely upon their foes.

CHAPTER XXVII.

RETROSPECTION.

"WELL, my friends, you're lookin' mighty bright an' scrumptious, mast-head me if ye ain't. I'm right glad to know you're feelin' no ill effects from your recent sojourn in the hands of the enemy," was Captain Kedge's hearty greeting as he approached his guests on the morning following the departure from the outlaws' retreat.

"Surely, captain, you cannot expect us to appear other than cheerful when you consider what a delightful change has been wrought in our condition during the past four-and-twenty hours," replied Earle Fairfax, complacently.

"Indeed, sir, it seems almost incredible that we are actually safe," burst in fair Bertha, whose own joy at the fortunate turn of affairs scarcely knew bounds. "We are secure from the malice of that arch fiend, Claude Kingsley! Ugh! The very thought of the monster causes my blood to congeal with horror."

The old skipper laughed heartily.

"It was a reg'lar surprise-party for the cap'n, an' no mistake. Guess he's convinced now that dirty pirate tricks are no match in the long run for Yankee pluck an' cunning. I reckon, friends, ye needn't expect any more trouble from that cantankerous cut-throat, Cap'n Claude."

"For that we are truly thankful," exclaimed Earle Fairfax, fervently. "Captain Kedge, we owe our salvation to the noble efforts of yourself and crew. The debt, I fear, is greater than can ever be repaid."

"And particularly are we indebted to that brave young seaman, Jack Lantern," supplemented Bertha Deane, for she had become acquainted with the circumstances that brought about the downfall of the enemy. "But for his timely exertions, I fear this victory would have been far more difficult of achievement."

"Ah, miss, you've hit the nail plumb on the head, an' no mistake," agreed the old mariner, promptly. "I'll bet my craft ag'in a herrin' that, if it warn't for the cuteness o' my boy,

Jack, ev'ry man ov us'd still be trussed up in the 'Antelope's' hold, livin' on the smell o' bilgewater an' rottin' fish—a position, by the way, which Cap'n Claude an' his rascally crew now enjoy. So it can't be denied that while we all had a finger in the pie, each contributin' his mite toward the general success, it is Jack Lantern who deserves the largest share of praise for the capture of the 'Flyin' Fishermen.'"

"While we are speaking of Jack Lantern, Mr. Kedge, I would like to ask a few questions concerning the gallant youth who bears that enigmatical name," said Bertha, after a pause. "Our attention was attracted to him immediately after we came on board your vessel, and curiosity prompted me to make inquiries; but, owing to the persistent attentions of Captain Claude, an opportunity has been deferred till now. I have remarked that the young sailor possesses rare intelligence, and is superior in every respect to his rough associates. Indeed, he seems quite out of place aboard a fishing-vessel."

"Well, ma'am, you are quite right in sayin' that Jack Lantern is an uncommonly smart lad," declared Captain Kedge, with all the enthusiasm he was wont to display when speaking of his young *protege*. "A better sailor never saw blue water, though I, myself, do say it. He kin give p'int's in seamanship to any skipper afloat. As for education, why, bless you! Jack is a reg'lar walkin' cyclopedier. Bein' only a poor fisher-boy, his schoolin' has nat'rally b'en limited; but he improves ev'ry minnit of his spare time, an' adds to his store of general knowledge in a way that's surprisin'. Oh, yes, ma'am! Jack Lantern's a remarkable lad—a very remarkable lad."

"Judging from the interest you take in the young man, I conclude he is some relation of yours—a nephew, perhaps?"

"You are wrong there, for Jack Lantern's no more akin to me than you are, though no father ever loved his son better than I love this noble sailor-boy."

"Who, then, are his parents?"

Captain Kedge shook his head sorrowfully.

"You ask a question that I am unable to answer, ma'am. I reckon the mystery o' Jack Lantern's parentage 'll never be solved," declared the old skipper. "You see the lad is a waif. He was rescued from the waves when but a tiny child, and whence came he the good Lord only knows."

"Indeed! My curiosity is increased, Mr. Kedge. Kindly favor me with further information concerning the finding of this infant seawaif," urged Bertha Deane, evincing intense interest in the subject.

"Wal, it happened egsactly fifteen years ago, if my ole head has kept the log correctly. I was in the cod-fishery then, as now, an' the Jack o'-Lantern, as I called my craft, was gen'rally rated the trimmest smack that poked her nose in an' out o' Marblehead Harbor. We were homeward bound after a quick an' successful trip, an' had jest hove in sight o' Cape Ann, when we were overtook by a sudden squall, the like o' which I never encountered afore nor since. The wind blew a reg'lar hairycane, an' threatened to drive us ashore, while the big waves did their best to swaller our little craft; but the Jack-o'-Lantern proved equal to the occasion, an' by dint o' desperate work we managed to outride the gale."

"When mornin' dawned, we found that other craft had not b'en so fortunate in escapin' the fury o' the storm, for bits o' wreckage were met with at frequent intervals. Suddenly our lookout bawled out that he'd made a s'prisin' discovery—an' so he had. A shattered spar was driftin' no great distance away, an' to it was lashed what 'peared to be the body of a little child."

"You kin jest b'lieve that this discovery set all hands agog with excitement, an' in almost less time than it takes to tell it, a boat's crew was speedin' toward the floatin' spar an' its curious freight. The shipwrecked waif proved to be a tiny boy—hardly more than a baby. Poor little chap. There warn't a dry eye in the hull crew as we looked upon his benumbed an' apparently lifeless form, exposed to the merciless attack of the icy waters."

"Ev'rybody s'posed fast enuff that the little one was quite dead; an' so 'twas a great s'prise to all hands when a faint flutterin' o' the heart warned us that a spark o' life yet remained in that tiny frame. We hurried him aboard the Jack-o'-Lantern, an' went to work to resuscitate him. It seemed almost a hopeless task, but our efforts were at last successful, an' the sea-waif opened his eyes. Howsumdover, we were too late to ward off the effects of sich terrible exposure, for it needed but a glance at the burnin' cheeks o' the child to warn us o' the presence of a fever that'd take more'n our rough nursin' to check."

"But the Jack-o'-Lantern soon dropped anchor in home waters, an' I at once took the shipwrecked child to my own humble dwellin', an' consigned him to the tender care o' my old maid sister, Nancy. The local sawbones was called in, an' 'lowed 'twas a mighty serious case; but his skill, together with Nancy's careful nursin', proved equal to the occasion, an' after a long an' desp'rit struggle, grim death was driven

from the door. Afore long the little feller was rompin' round the house, as happy as if nothin' had happened.

"Unfortunately, owin' to some mysterious workin's of the disease upon his brain, which same I don't pretend to understand, the child had become deprived of all memory of events previous to his illness; an' thus it cum about that, while he was uncommon smart and intelligent on all other matters, no 'mount o' questionin' could derive from him any information concernin' his past life. Why, the poor little chap had actually forgot his own name! This strange circumstance rendered difficult what would otherwise have proved an easy task, an' so we remained at sea regardin' the true birth o' this little sea-waif.

"So the weeks and months slipped away, an', as no one appeared to claim the castaway, we began to lose all hope of ever solvin' the mystery of his past life. We warn't altogether sorry for that, I confess, for the prattlin' little rogue had a'ready found a place in our hearts, an' Nancy allowed that the child's presence'd go a long way toward relievin' the tedium of her existence—for she was left alone the greater part o' the time, ye see. So the waif o' the wreck became a cherished member of our humble household, an' Nancy allowed that, such bein' the case, 'twas high time he had a name; an' s'long's there was no prospect o' knowin' that by which he'd b'en originally christened, 'twas quite fit an' proper for us to select another of our own likin'.

"Wal, the choosin' o' the name caused no lack o' bickerin' 'tween me an' Nancy, an' finally she proposed to call him *Jack Lantern*, after the gallant craft that picked him from the deep an' brought him safely into port. I reckoned the idee was a good 'un, an' no fault could be found with the first part o' the cognomen, at least, though as for the surname, it struck me as soundin' a leetle out o' the or'nary run. It seemed like tryin' to make *light* of a serious subject, d'ye see! Howsumdever, Nancy was sot on havin' her say, an' 'when a woman will, she will, ye may depend on't,' so the sea-waif cum to be known as *Jack Lantern*, which name has stuck to him ever since.

"Fifteen long years have ebb'd and flow'd since then, an' the castaway has grown from a tiny child to the strong, handsome fellow as ye see him now. Adopted an' reared by a poor, hard-workin' seafarer, the same lot has nat'rally b'en his; but, as ye know, he's far too intelligent for an or'nary fisherman. He b'longs to another an' higher station in life; an' though I love *Jack Lantern*'s well as my life, an' should hate most awfully to part with him, yet I hope to see the day when the waif o' the storm, who has so long b'en knockin' about in foreign waters, 'll drop anchor in his native harbor—home at last!"

Such was the interesting narrative that fell from the lips of Captain Tom Kedge, and not a word was lost upon his listeners. Bertha Deane seemed particularly impressed by the touching recital.

"It seems strange to me, Captain Kedge, that no traces could be found of the child's parents or other relatives!" she exclaimed, thoughtfully.

"So it does at first thought, ma'am, but I accounted for it by surmisin' that they were all aboard the vessel when she went down, an' that the youngster was the sole survivor, bein' lashed to the spar by unknown hands, an' driftin' until rescued in the manner I have described. In that case, there would be no 'un left to claim the child."

"True; but, sir, you at least know the name of the steamer which was wrecked off Cape Ann the night preceding the discovery of the waif, *Jack Lantern*, do you not?" demanded the young lady, with peculiar eagerness.

"No; not the particular craft which carried the youngster, I don't, for many a fine vessel sunk or went ashore that night, an' several steamers were among 'em. There was the *Clyde*, the *Star*, the *Forest City*—"

"The *Forest City*!" echoed Bertha Deane, mechanically, while the color forsook her face, and she would have fallen but for the sustaining arm of Earle Fairfax. "The *Forest City*!" she repeated. "It is the same name—the very same. Oh, Heaven! Can it be that in the sailor-boy, *Jack Lantern*, I have found my own long-lost brother?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

REUNION.

BERTHA DEANE'S excited speech and manner produced a decided sensation among her auditors, neither of whom were prepared for this startling interruption.

"*Jack Lantern* your brother? Is it possible that you really entertain such a remarkable belief?" demanded Earle Fairfax, in unfeigned astonishment; while Captain Kedge said nothing, but stared agape at his fair passenger, vaguely wondering if she had taken sudden leave of her senses.

"You may well wince surprise at the idea embodied in my words, for it naturally seems improbable to you that such a relationship exists," said Bertha, after a brief struggle to re-

gain her composure. "You, of course, are unaware that I once had a brother who, if living, would now be exactly the same age as your *protege*, *Jack Lantern*. He, with my mother, was lost at sea when but an infant—"

"The d—dickens, ye say! Are these real facts ye are givin' us, ma'am?" cried Captain Kedge, interruptively, his honest face expressing no little interest.

"Yes, according to the story of my guardian, Luke Osmond. I was myself too young at the time to remember the terrible occurrence. My guardian has told me how my mother, being suddenly called to her parents' home in Maine, journeyed hence with my infant brother, Ralph, leaving me at home with my father. The vessel upon which they set out to return was lost in a gale, and they were among the unfortunate ones who perished. The shock sent my father quickly to the grave, and I was left to the care of Luke Osmond, then his honored friend, but who has proved himself so unworthy of the trust.

"Until the present time I have never entertained the idea of either my mother or brother being still alive; but I know the steamer which bore them to their fate was named the '*Forest City*,' and you say that vessel was among those known to be lost on the night preceding the remarkable discovery of the child now known as *Jack Lantern*. This coincidence leads me to hope—yes, believe—that the sea-waif of your story is identical with my brother, Ralph."

Utter silence greeted the young lady as she finished, for her recital was to its hearers a veritable revelation, and for a time their astonishment was too great for audible expression.

"Waal, skin me for a cod-fish if I ain't 'tarnally flabbergasted!" old Tom Kedge finally managed to articulate. "Your story, ma'am, sorter' knocks me off my center, for, mast-head me if I was expectin' sich a revelation. Kin it be that my boy *Jack* is your brother? Has the sea-waif at last reached a solution of the mystery of his early life? Why, blame me, I'm only dreamin'—it can't be true!"

"True enough, captain, so far as the evidence goes," exclaimed the journalist. "Miss Deane is certainly justified in her belief, owing to the singular circumstances, and I sincerely trust her new-born hopes will not be blighted. Yet, on the other hand, it is not well to jump at conclusions merely because of the similarity of names and dates. It is quite possible that other children of the same age were aboard the wrecked vessel, in which case *Jack Lantern* and Ralph Deane may not be identical, after all."

"Alas! I had not thought of that," cried Bertha, in dismay. "Can it be that my hopes are, after all, misplaced? Oh, captain! Was there nothing found upon the shipwrecked child—no token that might prove a possible clew to his identity?"

"Waal, now, I sorter reckon there was somethin' o' that sort, but flay me if I hadn't forgot it, I'm so dog-goned frustrated. It may an' it may not be of any service to ye, ma'am. Howsumdever, I've preserved it carefully all these years, unbeknown to even the lad himself, hopin' that some time it might do its part in helpin' to restore the sea-waif to his home."

"Yes, yes! What is the article to which you refer, captain?" and the voice of the heiress trembled with eagerness.

"I have it here," declared the skipper, as from an inner pocket he produced a small package, carefully wrapped in oilskin, which upon opening, proved to be a finely-linked chain, attached to a tiny locket of gold. "'Twas around the lad's neck when we fished him out of the sea," he explained, as he delivered the trinket into Bertha's outstretched hand.

A slight touch caused the locket to fly open, and the miniature of a beautiful woman was revealed, at sight of which Bertha Deane uttered a cry of genuine amazement.

"D'ye know the pictur'?" interrogated Captain Kedge, eagerly.

For answer, the young lady tore off the chain that encircled her own fair neck, disclosing another locket similar to the first in design. This also contained a miniature, and it could be seen at a glance that the two pictures were exact counterparts.

"See!" cried Bertha, triumphantly. "This is my dead mother's picture, which I have worn about my neck since childhood, and that which you have shown me is a perfect likeness. Is it not sufficient proof, gentlemen, that I have found my brother at last?"

"Certainly, the circumstances of the two lockets with their similar contents will go far to establish the truth," assented Earle Fairfax, as soon as he could recover from this new surprise.

"Ay, ay! The pictur' bizness settles all doubts in my mind. If *Jack Lantern* ain't yer brother, then how come yer mother's pictur' a-hangin' round his neck? There's no answerin' sich logic—no, sir-ee! But where is *Jack*? We must tell the gallant lad of his good fortune. I'll call him!"

"I am already here," cried a manly voice, and *Jack Lantern* suddenly entered the cabin, his handsome face flushed with excitement.

"What, *Jack*! Ye have heard—"

"Everything, captain! I chanced to over-

hear my name pronounced as I approached, and curiosity tempted me to play the part of an eavesdropper. 'Tis said that 'listeners never hear aught good of themselves,' but in this case I am pleased to know that the old adage is at fault. I have heard the solution of the mystery that has enshrouded my life, and rejoice at the restoration of my beloved sister, of whose love and sympathy I have been deprived by cruel Fate since the days of my childhood."

The handsome young sailor's gaze was fixed eagerly, tenderly, upon Bertha Deane, who, yielding to a sudden impulse, rushed impetuously into his outstretched arms.

"Brother Ralph!"

"Bertha, my sister!"

Happily reunited, the two orphans were clasped in a fond embrace, and the others, deeming their presence obtrusive, discreetly retired from the tender scene.

It is quite needless to reproduce the long and animated conversation that followed the meeting of brother and sister—for the actual existence of such relationship was now determined to the complete satisfaction of all concerned; nor is it necessary to add that both were overjoyed at the rare good fortune that brought about this glad reunion.

There never assembled a merrier party than the group of four who, shortly afterward, gathered in the cabin of the black schooner, determined, as Earle Fairfax declared, "to celebrate the joyous occasion in as fitting a manner as circumstances would allow." The table was laden with choice wines and dainty viands which Captain Claude had brought aboard for his own private consumption, and which now formed a very substantial basis for a banquet—lacking, no doubt, in elegance and formality, but none the less a source of enjoyment to its participants.

A constant flow of conversation enlivened the occasion, and all were imbued with a spirit of mirth and good-fellowship. In that hour of unalloyed enjoyment, all recent trials and tribulations were speedily forgotten.

But the dream of bliss was destined to a rude awakening, for, when the conviviality was at its height, a seaman suddenly entered and, approaching Captain Kedge, hurriedly whispered a few words in that worthy's ear.

There was a look of anxiety on the skipper's face as, hastily excusing himself, he arose and made his way on deck. A quick glance told him that he had been called none to soon.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A STORM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

WITH A suddenness not uncommon in those wild northern latitudes, a vast change had taken place. The refulgent sun and smiling azure sky had disappeared as if by magic, and in their place great banks of ink storm-clouds gathered with appalling rapidity. An unnatural calm prevailed over sea and sky, and experienced Captain Kedge knew full well what this ominous stillness portended—realized that he was threatened by a storm of awful magnitude.

Promptly his orders were issued, and instantly the deck of the "*Flying Fish*" became a scene of great activity as the agile sailors rushed to make all snug and taut before the bursting of the gale.

Captain Kedge ordered the "*Antelope*" to be brought up alongside and made fast to the black schooner, for he reasoned that, by so doing, a broader surface would be presented to the mountainous waves, and, consequently, the danger of capsizing would be greatly lessened. By this means he was confident of outriding the tempest.

But, alas! for the skipper's calculations, before the necessary movements could be accomplished the storm burst upon them with frightful fury. The stout hawser that connected the schooners was snapped asunder as if but a slender thread, and the crews of the two vessels found themselves hidden from one another's view by the blinding hail that accompanied the gale. The situation of the "*Antelope*" was the more critical, for that craft was partially disabled and but four men were on board to manage her, exclusive of the outlaws in the hold. However, much as Captain Kedge lamented the predicament of these men, it was an utter impossibility to aid them; and, indeed, his own crew was none too large to cope with the terrible perils that now encompassed them.

The "*Flying Fish*," driven directly before the wind, flew on with fearful velocity. Her slender spars creaked and swayed, and she shook from stem to stern, while each time she plunged into the trough of the sea it seemed that she would never rise again. Yet, the trim craft continued to surmount the tremendous swells with an ease and buoyancy that must have gratified her old commander, could he have witnessed the behavior of his pet vessel. Captain Claude made no mistake when he selected the black schooner as a model of seaworthiness—a fit craft to carry the banner of the "*Flying Fishermen*."

But the gale steadily increased in violence, and it was a question if the gallant vessel would, after all, outlive the incessant assault of wind and wave. It was an ordeal that few craft of so light burden could withstand, how-

ever stanch and seaworthy, and the storm-tossed mariners might well feel doubtful of the result.

Captain Kedge himself stood at the wheel, for never was there a better helmsman than he, and he felt that this was indeed an occasion that called for the utmost coolness and skill. His every nerve was strained to hold the craft strictly to her course, for upon his ability to do this their safety mainly depended. Jack Lantern, as the gallant young seaman may still be called, took command of the deck and coolly directed the movements of the crew.

Drenched to the skin, chilled and blinded by the driving sleet, the dauntless fishermen clung desperately to their posts, while the moments dragged slowly, wearily away. Still, like a living statue, old Tom Kedge maintained his perilous station, and still from crest to crest bounded the stanch Flying Fish at undiminished speed, until at last the tempest showed some signs of abatement, and hope revived in the breasts of the exhausted mariners.

Yet, though the gale had reached and passed the acme of its fury, the knowledge of this fact permitted no immediate relaxation of vigilance on the part of Captain Kedge and his gallant crew. The seas were running tremendously high, and frequently one of extraordinary size and power would break over the taut little "Flying Fish," threatening to bury her from sight by its sheer weight alone. It was not until far into the night that the cautious skipper deemed it safe to go below and leave his vessel in the hands of the regular watch.

Throughout the night a sharp lookout was maintained for their late consort, the Antelope, but no lights were visible to indicate her position. Still, it was faintly hoped that daylight would show the lost schooner to be still afloat and in the near vicinity. When morning dawned, however, the closest scrutiny failed to reveal the object of solicitude, and though Captain Kedge spent several hours cruising about in various directions, the result was as before. It seemed probable that the handful of men left aboard the Antelope, proving incapable of managing the craft, had all succumbed to the fury of the storm.

But just then a discovery was made that caused a decided sensation among the fishermen. The lookout reported a strange object floating in the water several miles to leeward, so small and indistinct that its exact nature could not be determined. The "Flying Fish" was immediately headed in that direction, and the captain used his glass with such good effect that he was soon able to announce the object to be a raft, bearing four men who were gesticulating wildly as if afraid the schooner would pass them by.

Approaching still nearer, all hands were electrified to learn that the castaways were their own comrades, the crew of the "Antelope," who had just been given up as lost. It was not long before the rescued seamen stood on the deck of the black schooner, rejoiced beyond measure at so speedy a deliverance. The story of their experience, as narrated by Captain Kedge, was substantially as follows:

Finding themselves assailed by a storm of fearful magnitude, cut off from their comrades, and well aware of their own inability to save the threatened vessel, one of their number hastened below and speedily set the captive freebooters at liberty. The "Flying Fishermen" swarmed on deck, and, under the able command of Captain Claude, succeeded in preserving the craft from the fury of the gale. But when the storm abated, it was found that the "Antelope" was leaking badly in several places, and nothing could prevent her from soon going to the bottom. Captain Claude immediately caused the boats to be provisioned, and, with his followers, left the doomed vessel and departed to the westward. He did not take the four fishermen, however, but left them aboard the sinking craft, bound hand and foot, thus demonstrating his utter want of gratitude. The seamen were not destined to perish, for one of their number soon contrived to slip his bonds, and then released his associates. Not a single boat being left, it remained for the dauntless tars to build and launch a rude craft, which task was completed just in the nick of time, for hardly had they put off from the "Antelope" when that vessel, with a violent lurch, went down and disappeared forever.

So, Captain Claude and his nefarious followers were once more at liberty—a fact that caused no little disgust as well as alarm. Old Tom Kedge was "madder'n a hornet" at having his scheme of vengeance thus inopportunistically frustrated, while the friends of Bertha Deane feared lest the arch-plotter should improve his earliest opportunity to hatch more mischief. Captain Kedge was uncharitable enough to hope that the entire gang had found their way to Davy Jones's locker, yet the probability remained that they would safely reach the adjacent coast of Nova Scotia.

The "Flying Fish" was now headed for Halifax, it being the skipper's intention to report his case to the American consul at that port. However, something occurred which resulted in the abandonment of this purpose.

As the schooner neared the entrance of Hali-

fax Harbor, she passed within hailing distance of a large steamer outward bound. Jack Lantern was idly scrutinizing the throng that occupied the deck of the steamship, and suddenly made a discovery that wrung a cry of astonishment from his lips.

"Captain Claude is aboard yonder vessel!" he cried.

The youth was not mistaken, for every one now recognized the massive individual who stood by the rail, intently regarding the schooner and its passengers. The villain apparently comprehended that he was observed, and was by no means disconcerted thereat, for he coolly lifted his hat and made a mocking bow.

Then the steamer passed by and receded in the distance, while our friends quickly gathered in the cabin to discuss this new phase of the situation.

"The scoundrel was undoubtedly picked up by a passing vessel directly after he left the wreck, else he could not have possibly reached this port ahead of us," declared Jack Lantern. "And now he is off again, evidently anxious to get out of the country before we lodge a complaint with the authorities against him. I wonder where that craft is bound!"

"She's the Boston boat, I reckon," said Captain Kedge, positively.

"Then if that scoundrel is bound for Boston, I can readily divine his intentions," Bertha Deane exclaimed. "His original scheme being irretrievably ruined, he will now doubtless seek to profit by returning to the service of Luke Osmond. I believe he intends to apprise my recreant guardian of the truth, and give him an opportunity to abscond."

"Or, perhaps, to wrest more money from Osmond by false pretenses or by force," added the journalist.

"We must thwart the villain, if such be his designs; but—how can it be accomplished gentlemen?"

A ready answer to the query was not forthcoming.

"I reckon," said Captain Kedge, finally, "that 'tarnal skunk has got the deadwood on us, as the sayin' goes. He has the advantage of steam 'g'inst wind, remember, an' will reach port long afore us, barrin' accidents. I'm 'fraid our cake is dough!"

"But I have a suggestion to offer," declared Earle Fairfax, whose fertile brain had been actively employed. "These provincial steamers are notoriously slow and unreliable, and I believe we have a chance to circumvent the enemy, after all. I propose that we make all haste to reach Rockland, Maine, where connection may be made for Boston, via Portland, by rail. Once on the train, we will regain much of the lost time, and, I believe, arrive at our destination in season to thwart the greatest rascals who go unhung."

Earle's proposition was greeted with unanimous approval, and Captain Kedge immediately ordered his vessel put about and headed for the open main.

Favorable breezes helped the "Flying Fish" on her way, and Rockland was reached even sooner than expected. Leaving the vessel in charge of one of his trusty crew, with orders to proceed directly to Boston, the skipper joined the little party that hurried to catch the earliest train.

There were lively times in prospect, and Captain Kedge proposed to be "in at the death."

CHAPTER XXX.

CAPTAIN CLAUDE'S TRIUMPH.

WITHIN his luxurious private room Luke Osmond sat alone, looking a very picture of ease and affluence as he reclined indolently in his favorite easy-chair, a bottle of champagne at his elbow, a half-smoked cheroot between his lips, and in his hands a newspaper, the perusal of which seemed to afford him no little satisfaction.

Occupying a conspicuous place in its columns was a cable dispatch from Liverpool that read as follows:

"The Cunard steamship 'Cephalonia,' which arrived last evening from Boston, is reported as having encountered unusually rough weather during her passage. On the second night out a terrific gale assailed the vessel, and for a time destruction seemed inevitable; but superior seamanship finally brought her through with flying colors, no damage being sustained save the loss of one boat which was carried away. But the affair caused vast excitement among the passengers, many of whom rushed on deck, panic-stricken, under the impression that the ship was sinking."

"When order finally prevailed, it was found that three of the passengers were missing, together with two deck-hands, all having undoubtedly been swept overboard and lost in the raging sea. The names of the unfortunate voyagers are given as: Miss Bertha Deane, Earle Fairfax and Claude Kingsley. Of the latter nothing is known, as they were journeying unaccompanied; but from the friend and traveling companion of Miss Deane much has been gleaned concerning that ill-fated young lady, highly cultured and beautiful and a particularly brilliant star in the galaxy of society belles. The orphan daughter and only heir of one of Boston's wealthiest merchants, she was about to come into possession of a colossal fortune, which has been accumulating interest undisturbed for many years. Her companion, Mrs. Lewis, who is heart-broken at

the terrible calamity, will return by the next steamer, and it is indeed sad tidings she will bear to the friends and admirers of the unfortunate heiress."

It was without the slightest trace of sorrow that heartless Luke Osmond greeted the news of his ward's sad fate; on the contrary, his feelings were akin to elation, if one might judge by the exultant gleam that flashed in his evil eyes.

For why should the unscrupulous nabob feel regret at a circumstance that but hastened the very end which he had himself planned and anticipated? If the newspaper report was true, (and there seemed no reason for doubting its authenticity), then Bertha Deane was out of the way forever, while he was free to continue his perfidious career without fear of molestation.

"Jove! I can hardly realize that fortune has played so directly into my hands," the old rascal ejaculated, at length, after perusing the newspaper article for at least the dozenth time. "My anticipations are more than realized, thanks to this lucky interposition of fate. Not only is the girl effectually disposed of, but my zealous friend, Kingsley, is also food for fishes. That signifies considerable to me, for had the fellow lived to return after accomplishing the purpose for which I employed him, he would not only have claimed the balance of his promised reward, but would doubtless have continued to bleed me from time to time under threats of exposure. Now, thank fate! I'm well rid of them both, and Abner Deane's million is mine beyond dispute."

"Is, eh? Don't let that erroneous idea run away with you, dear boy," came a cool voice from behind, so suddenly that Luke Osmond leaped from his chair as though shot from a catapult.

A bewildered cry escaped the nabob's lips as, turning, he beheld the very man whom he had fondly believed to be at the bottom of the Atlantic—Captain Claude Kingsley! Yes; there stood the redoubtable adventurer, smiling scornfully as he noted Osmond's air of utter surprise and dismay.

"Frightened you, did I?" exclaimed the rover, laughing heartily. "Pardon me, old fellow; for I really didn't know your nerves were so sensitive."

"How in the name of Jupiter came you here in this room?" demanded the elder villain, regaining his speech when he found it was really a figure of flesh and blood that confronted him.

"Why, I walked in, to be sure, while you were engrossed in the perusal of yonder newspaper. The street door being ajar, as well as that of your own apartment, I had no difficulty in finding my way to your presence without the formality of announcing my coming. Being the bearer of glad tidings, I had anticipated a hearty welcome; but, alas! I involuntarily play the part of an eavesdropper, only to hear certain remarks from your lips that are, to say the least, uncomplimentary to one who has served you so faithfully."

"But—but—I don't understand," stammered Luke Osmond, still too thoroughly amazed to heed the rover's sarcastic speech. "You see, this paper says—"

"Oh, yes; I know what the paper says," Captain Claude interrupted, "for as I stood at your back it was an easy matter to read the interesting paragraph which seemed to afford you so much satisfaction. I dare say those English reporters believed every word they wrote, but in this case the evidence was misleading, and in a portion of the story at least they are egregiously at fault."

"But resume your seat, dear Osmond, and, when I have refreshed myself with the rare vintage which I see displayed so temptingly, I will tell you how it happens that I am here at this moment bothering you, instead of lying at the bottom of the briny deep as you were led to suppose."

The nabob obediently sunk back into his cushioned chair and stared blankly at his unwelcome visitor, as the latter coolly proceeded to sample the sparkling beverage in a way that argued ill for the continuance of the supply.

"Now for an explanation of the mystery," exclaimed Captain Claude, pausing only when the last drop was drained, and seating himself opposite his companion in crime. "You see, I took passage on the Cephalonia, and watched eagerly for an opportunity to win the reward which you so generously offered at our last meeting for the 'removal' of your ward. That opportunity presented itself on the second night of the voyage, when we were assailed by a violent storm. As the newspaper truthfully says, much confusion prevailed for a time, and scores of the passengers rushed frantically on deck. Among them was the beautiful Bertha, and, as I saw her clinging to the rail, I realized that the time was ripe for action. I crept behind her unobserved just as the steamer, hovering for an instant on the crest of a gigantic wave, plunged wildly down into the trough of the sea, and then—somehow, I happened to fall against her, and with a shriek she disappeared over the side. However, the movement resulted disastrously to me as well, for I lost my equilibrium and followed the girl into the sea. It happened that a

boat had just been carried away from the steamer, and I succeeded in reaching this as it drifted near me. All night I clung to the overturned boat, and shortly after daybreak was picked up by the crew of a fishing schooner, with whom I remained until they returned to this port. So, now you will understand, dear Osmond, in what respect the English newspaper was at fault, and also how it comes about that I am back again to claim your gratitude and—that little balance of fifteen thousand dollars."

Captain Claude spoke volubly, and with as much apparent sincerity as if the story he related was the naked truth, instead of a cunning falsehood. Foiled in his original designs, he had concluded that "half a loaf is better than none," and accordingly arranged his plans to obtain the balance of the amount promised by the rascally nabob for the death of Bertha Deane. With this once in his possession, he would step quietly aside, and leave unsuspecting Luke Osmond to face the storm that was sure to follow the arrival of the party from the north. True, he might then have warned the nabob of his danger, that the latter might flee from the wrath to come; but Captain Claude was not inclined to magnanimity, and secretly rejoiced at the inevitable downfall of his companion in villainy.

Luke Osmond listened attentively, though perhaps not altogether credulously, to the adventurer's plausible explanation.

"Yours was, indeed, a marvelous escape, Kingsley," he exclaimed, rather constrainedly. "Allow me to congratulate you—"

"Oh, save your breath, old fellow!" interrupted Captain Claude, laughing sarcastically. "I have no earthly use for congratulations, and particularly when they are insincere. Remember, I overheard your little soliloquy a few minutes since, and so am well aware how bitterly disappointed you feel on finding me still alive and kicking. However, set your fears at rest, for I have too much important business on hand to waste time in pestering a poor, innocent old gentleman like you; and after our account is satisfactorily adjusted I shall immediately withdraw my objectionable presence, never to bother you again. So now, if you please, a check for the amount due will be acceptable, as I have a pressing engagement and must be off at once."

"Indeed! Pray, to what extent am I in your debt?" demanded Osmond, with a show of surprise.

"Why, just fifteen thousand dollars, to be sure! Have you already forgotten the terms of our agreement?"

"I have forgotten nothing, I assure you. The sum you mention was to be paid by me only on receipt of satisfactory proof that you had really performed your part of the bargain. Such proof, my dear fellow, is not as yet forthcoming!"

"What! Do you mean to insinuate that I have lied to you?" demanded Captain Claude, in rising anger.

"Well, it's certainly possible, if not probable, that the girl met her fate purely by accident—not through your agency, as you would have me believe. With such a golden reward in prospect, it is but natural for you to seek to further your own purpose by misrepresenting the matter. However, I don't propose to be imposed upon; and, having already paid you ten thousand dollars, I am justified, under the circumstances, in considering that sum a very munificent reward for your services."

The rover's countenance clearly expressed his surprise and anger at this unexpected stand on the part of the nabob.

"Ah! So that's your little game!" he cried. "You seek to evade payment for a service that has secured to you undisputed possession of a property fifty-fold greater than the paltry sum demanded. Shame! I had not anticipated such base ingratitude—such unparalleled meanness! Now, see here, Luke Osmond, I don't want to quarrel with my old friend and partner; nevertheless, I insist that you keep your agreement and square your indebtedness like a man."

Captain Claude's eyes flashed ominously—his voice had an angry ring; and the aristocrat, observing these signs, wondered if he had not been indiscreet in thus provoking the wrath of his redoubtable visitor.

"Well, Kingsley, rather than to cause dissatisfaction, I am willing to yield a point! Suppose you take five thousand and call the account square?" he suggested.

"I claim fifteen thousand—not one cent less!" cried the adventurer, firmly.

"Five is enough—more than enough, I tell you!" persisted the nabob.

Captain Claude's right hand executed a dexterous movement, and Luke Osmond was electrified to see the muzzle of a revolver pressed against his breast.

"I said fifteen thousand, my hearty," reiterated the rover, coolly. "You will do well to produce that amount instantly; otherwise, this shooter may explode, in which case you can easily foresee the consequences."

The discomfited nabob needed but a glance to realize how thoroughly his visitor was in earnest, and, with a muttered curse, he reached for a pen.

"Since you insist so emphatically, I suppose I

must obey. It's worth the amount to get rid of you, anyway!" he growled, savagely.

"Ha, ha! I thought the persuasive eloquence of this shooting-iron would bring you to terms!" exclaimed Captain Claude, in glee. "Now, then, scribble off a check payable to your own order for fifteen— Hold on! Make it twenty thousand, or, better still, twenty-five! Yes, twenty-five thousand will suit me exactly!"

Osmond hesitated only for an instant, for the ominous click of the pistol-hammer speedily set his faltering pen in motion.

"Make the check for twenty-five thousand, and indorse it," directed Kingsley, and the aristocrat had no alternative but to obey, though he did it with exceeding ill-grace.

Captain Claude took the valuable paper, inspected it carefully, and stowed it safely away in his capacious pocket, while at the same time the threatening revolver was restored to its proper place.

"Many thanks for the favor, dear fellow!" he exclaimed, mockingly. "And now, our account being satisfactorily adjusted, to myself at least, I see no occasion for prolonging my stay; so nothing remains but for me to bid you an affectionate good-by!"

With a sarcastic laugh, the cool rascal turned to go; but at that moment something occurred to interrupt his intended departure. The door suddenly flew open, and beautiful Bertha Deane appeared in the entrance. Close behind her could be seen Jack Lantern, Earle Fairfax and sturdy Captain Kedge, each and all of whom wore an eager, determined look that boded ill to the scoundrels so unexpectedly brought to bay.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE END.

As Bertha Deane walked unhesitatingly into the room, closely followed by her resolute friends, utter consternation overwhelmed Luke Osmond and his rascally companion. The former sat trembling in every limb—a picture of terror and amazement; for there, alive and well, stood the fair girl whom he had fondly believed to be at the bottom of the ocean.

Nor was Captain Claude scarcely less amazed to behold the party whom he had left behind at Halifax. Not counting upon their arrival until at least a day later, he was at a loss to understand how so speedy a return had been accomplished.

"Well, I have returned, as you see, Mr. Osmond," announced Bertha, coolly, fixing her gaze upon the discomfited old scoundrel, cowering before her in abject dismay. "What is the matter, sir? Really, you do not seem over-delighted to see me."

"Pardon me, my dear—I'm quite dumfounded—you appeared so unexpectedly, you know," he stammered apologetically, making a desperate attempt to disguise his uneasiness. "But, my dear, who are these—ah—persons?" looking askance at Bertha's stalwart escort.

"Three gentlemen who have interested themselves in my behalf, and whose acquaintance I know you will be delighted to form," explained the heiress, readily. "This is Captain Kedge, a most excellent gentleman, and a true friend of the innocent and oppressed. This is Mr. Earle Fairfax, whom I believe you once met before, and you will be pleased to learn that he is my prospective husband. And, finally, I have the pleasure of presenting my own new-found brother—Ralph Deane!"

Captain Kingsley uttered a sharp cry, while Luke Osmond fairly leaped from his chair, so great was his amazement.

"What! Are you crazy, girl? Your brother? Impossible! Why he was drowned at sea when but an infant!" cried the nabob, forgetting all else in his excitement.

"On the contrary, Ralph Deane did not perish, but was rescued by Captain Kedge, who reared him as his own, training him to the hardy, perilous life of a fisherman. As such, the youth has lived in ignorance of his parentage until, at last, kind fate dispelled the mystery and brought about a glad reunion."

"Ay!" cried Jack Lantern, "I have found my sister, and that, too, just in time to aid her in running down the greatest rascal still unhung. So you are Luke Osmond, eh? You are the treacherous scoundrel who bargained for the murder of my sister, that you might secure her property—and mine! Blow me if I haven't a mind to strangle you with my own hands, you old shark!"

The young sailor's eyes blazed furiously, as, unable to restrain his feelings longer, he vigorously denounced the hypocritical scoundrel. With suddenly blanching face, the latter recoiled in dire alarm.

"What—what does this mean?" he gasped.

"It means that your rascality is known and will meet the punishment it deserves," declared Bertha Deane, boldly. "We are in full possession of the details of your perfidious plot, by which you sought to control my father's fortune. For the disclosure of your scheme you may thank the rascal, yonder, whom you employed to put me out of the way. Really, Mr. Osmond, you should have exercised better judgment in selecting an accomplice."

For a moment the old scoundrel stood as if

petrified; then, with a furious snarl, he turned upon Captain Claude, who stood complacently near.

"Traitor!—wretch! You have betrayed me!" he shrieked. "By Heaven! You shall pay dearly for your treachery!"

Perfectly insane from sudden anger and excitement, he rushed madly upon the rover, but the latter met him calmly, and averted his attack with apparently little effort.

"Don't work yourself into a frenzy, old squid!" he advised, pushing the frantic man into a chair. "No need of acting like a stark, staring maniac. You've got yourself into a tight fix, I'll allow, and it remains for you to keep cool and get out again the best way you can. As for myself, I reckon my presence isn't particularly desirable, so I'll kindly leave you to face the music."

Apparently cool and unconcerned, yet with every sense on the alert, Luke's audacious confederate turned to leave the room. Prepared to fight desperately for freedom, he was somewhat surprised to see that no one stirred to dispute his passage.

The reason for this was obvious, however, when Captain Claude, reaching the door, found himself confronted by a group of stalwart policemen who effectually barred further progress.

"Curse the luck! I am trapped!" cried the outlaw, in dismay, as the three men within the room rushed toward him.

Like a flash he dashed across the room to where a window stood invitingly open, and, in a moment, disappeared from view.

The others, following, found themselves upon a narrow balcony; but Captain Claude had vanished! An instant later, however, a wild cry reached their ears, immediately succeeded by a peculiar crash as of a falling body; then all was silent.

Hastening to the street below, a distressing sight met the gaze of the man-hunters. In attempting to descend from the balcony, the fugitive, missing his hold, had fallen to the pavement with terrific force. A crushed, lifeless, almost unrecognizable mass was before them, and Captain Claude, chief of the "Flying Fishermen," had gone to final reckoning.

Standing in an awe-struck group, gravely contemplating the form of the outlaw, those below were startled by the sharp report of a pistol, seemingly coming from within the mansion. Rushing up-stairs, to the room just vacated, the horror-stricken spectators realized that another tragedy had been enacted.

Stretched at full length upon the carpet, Luke Osmond lay still and dead—a ragged bullet-hole in his temple, a still smoking revolver in his nerveless hand!

The wretched man had, by self-destruction, terminated his unfortunate career!

Little remains to add.

Two years have passed since Captain Claude and Luke Osmond made their life exit.

Earle Fairfax and his beautiful bride, *nee* Bertha Deane, reside in a mansion in the suburbs, and, needless to say, their friends and admirers are legion. The journalist's unexpected good fortune did not induce him to abandon his chosen profession; but, with the increased capital at his command, he was enabled to purchase a controlling interest in one of the leading dailies, and is now a man of mark and influence.

Ralph Deane (no longer Jack Lantern, the fisher-boy) is energetically preparing for an active business career. He has just entered Harvard, and it is safe to predict, will graduate from the noble old university with honor. He often contrasts this new existence with the old life of toil and hardship, and is duly thankful for the dispensation of Providence that brought about such propitious results.

As for that bluff, gallant old sea-dog, Captain Kedge, it is unnecessary to say that he still "plows the raging main," for he is wedded to his calling, and no amount of persuasion can keep him long from blue water. However, he no longer engages in the hazardous and often unremunerative cod-fishery, but is in command of one of the finest ships afloat, bought and presented to him by his foster-son, Jack Lantern. He is now absent on an extended voyage—the first in his new craft—to China and the East Indies.

The case of the "Flying Fishermen" was duly presented to the proper authorities, and earnest though futile efforts were made to bring the freebooters to justice. Newfoundland fishermen strenuously denied all connection with the outrage perpetrated, and it was concluded, rightly no doubt, that the various offenses were committed by an unscrupulous gang of scoundrels who, thanks to the strained relations existing between the Americans and natives, found it an easy matter to throw suspicion upon the innocent fishermen for their own deeds of violence.

The fishery question continues to be a theme of general discussion, as a glance at the daily newspapers may show; but it is improbable that the famous "codfish war" will again furnish such stirring events as those which marked the brief though desperate career of the "Flying Fishermen."

THE END.

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- 141 Equinox Tom, the Bully of Bed Rock; or, Dan Brown's Masterstroke. By Jos. E. Badger, Jr.
- 143 Captain Crimson, the Man of the Iron Face; or, The Nemesis of the Plains. By Maj. Dangerfield Burr.
- 143 The Czar's Spy; or, The Nihilist League. By Col. T. H. Monstery.
- 144 The Hunchback [of Notre-Dame. By Victor Hugo.
- 145 Pistol Pard; or, Soft Hand, the Silent Sport from Cinnabar. By Wm. R. Eyster.
- 146 The Doctor Detective; or, The Mystery of the Golden Coffin. By George Lemuel.
- 147 Gold Spur, the Gentleman from Texas; or, The Child of the "Regiment. By Colonel Prentiss Ingraham.
- 148 One-Armed Alf, the Giant Hunter of the Great Lakes. By Oil Coomes.
- 149 The Border Rifles. By Gustave Aimard.
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- 151 The Freebooters. By Gustave Aimard.
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- 158 The Doomed Dozen; or, Dolores, the Danite's Daughter. By Dr. Frank Powell.
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- 160 Soft Hand Sharp; or, The Man With the Sand. By Wm. R. Eyster.
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- 166 Owllet, the Robber Prince; or, The Unknown Highwayman. By Septimus R. Urban.
- 167 The Man of Steel; or, The Masked Knight of the White Plume. By A. P. Morris.
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- 179 Conrad, the Convict; or, Was He Guilty? By Prof. Stewart Gildersleeve, LL.D.
- 180 Old '49; or, The Amazon of Arizona. By Jos. E. Badger, Jr.
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- 186 The Black Bravo; or, The Tonkaway's Triumph. By Buckskin Sam.
- 187 The Death's Head Cuirassiers; or, Brave of All Braves. By Capt. Fred. Whittaker.
- 188 The Phantom Mazeppa; or, The Hyena of the Chaparrals. By Major Dangerfield Burr.
- 189 Wild Bill's Gold Trail; or, The Desperado Dozen. By Col. Prentiss Ingraham.
- 190 The Three Guardsmen. By Alexandre Dumas.
- 191 The Terrible Tonkaway; or, Old Rocky and His Pard. By Buckskin Sam.
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99 William Street, New York.